

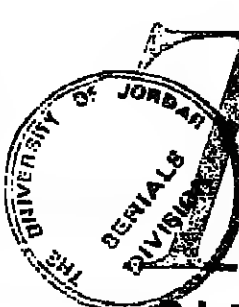
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Mo Mowlam must  
take another risk

This section, page 12

Neo-Nazis held over 'subway bomb plot'

## 'New York anthrax attack' foiled

Christopher Reed  
in Los Angeles

TWO members of the Aryan Nation, a violent white supremacist group, have been arrested in Nevada while allegedly planning to bomb the New York underground train system with deadly anthrax.

FBI agents arrested the two as they sat in a car outside a doctor's clinic in Henderson, a light-industrial town of nearly 70,000 near Las Vegas, where the men had earlier been under surveillance.

An FBI spokesman said experts had "made everything safe" and stressed that the area where the arrests were made was never in any danger.

One man was named as Larry Wayne Harris, a 46-year-old microbiologist from Ohio. He was already on probation after receiving a 15-month sentence for passing on anthrax through the mail. In his defence on that charge, he claimed he had discovered an Iraqi plot to attack America with biological weapons and was seeking an antidote.

In November 1996, after his indictment but before he was sentenced, he promoted his book, *Bacteriological Warfare: A Major Threat to North America*, around Ohio fairgrounds. He told people that they should take antibiotics to protect against bubonic plague, which he said could be spread at any time.

The other suspect was named as William Leavitt, aged 47. The pair, arrested on Wednesday night, were taken to a hospital to be examined for contamination before being put behind bars.

The car, in which they were believed to be carrying anthrax material, was taken to nearby Nellis US air force base for examination. Las Vegas FBI agent Bobby Siller said the two were going to hospital for "research" and that experts had to be called to remove the anthrax.

The FBI said they had no conclusive evidence that a particular city was to be targeted. "These individuals were involved in the construction of a weapon," said a spokesman. "We have no idea where they were going to use it."

But the mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, was told about the arrests by FBI director Louis Freeh, and he assured people there was no cause for alarm.

High on hate... the scene at a recent white supremacist aryan nations rally in Hamilton, Ohio

In a public statement Mr Giuliani said: "Every part of America, every part of the world, is vulnerable to terrorism... I think New York City is doing everything it can do to try to reduce the risk."

Although America's racist extremists belong to an odd assortment of bizarre cults and groups with small memberships, they have been extremely violent.

In 1993 the FBI in Los Angeles arrested eight skinheads, "commanders" of established organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryans. The eight were plotting to

bomb a black church and assassinate Rodney King, the black man whose assault by white policemen led to the Los Angeles race riots of 1992.

The alleged anthrax plot recalls a Tokyo subway attack in 1995 that killed 19 people. The Aum Shinri Kyo cult, which is fatal through inhalation or skin contact,

The Aryan Nation is based in rural Hayden Falls, Idaho, in the Pacific north-west. They would ban non-whites from an area comprising Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, but their biggest rallies, in which camouflage-clad men burn crosses, attract only a few hundred at the most.

# Masons get final warning

Alan Travis  
Home Affairs Editor

PARLIAMENT yesterday opened with Britain's oldest "secret" society as MPs ordered the Freemasons to hand over the names of their members connected with past police corruption scandals.

The officials of the United Grand Lodge of England now risk facing a formal charge of being in contempt of Parliament, backed by the threat of imprisonment, unless they are prepared to submit to the demand from MPs for names.

The dramatic confrontation combined with the promise earlier in the week by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to bring in legislation to "out" masons who are serving judges and police officers, threatens finally to strip away the cloak of secrecy from the 8,600 masonic lodges.

There were a series of angry exchanges between Chris Mullin, chairman of the Commons home affairs committee, and Michael Higham, grand secretary of the United Grand Lodge of Freemasonry, over the naming of masons.

It is a contest in which MPs are trying to shine a light on the activities of an organisation which reaches the highest levels of the British establishment.

Among its ruling council — the general purposes board — are the current Grand Master, the Duke of Kent, Lord Farnham, Pro Grand Master, a former Appeal Court judge, Sir John Balcombe, a second senior judicial figure, Judge J. L. Sessions, and the Earl of Cadogan.

Martin Short, author of *Inside the Brotherhood*, said last night: "Thirty years ago, no politician would have dared to attempt to call the Freemasons to account."

They really are on the ropes. The impact on their membership could be quite serious. This is 'make your mind up' time."

Commander Higham now faces the threat of an order by the Sergeant at Arms unless he discloses the requisite names within 14 days.

He risks being dragged to the Bar of the House of Commons and a maximum penalty of being imprisoned until



repeatedly clashed with Commander Higham during yesterday's hearing. At one point, Commander Higham dismissed the police scandals as "pretty academic" and complained that MPs were conducting a "fishing expedition".

His stonewalling provoked Mr Mullin to point out angrily that he was talking about allegations from masons and former police officers that there was "a firm within a firm" in the former West Midlands Serious Crime Squad, which was responsible for more than 30 miscarriages of justice.

Asked for a final time whether he would provide the information, Commander Higham said: "Not straight away, no. I hope you will accept that is 'no', but not in a contemptuous way."

Mr Mullin snapped: "That will be for Parliament to decide." After the hearing Commander Higham indicated that co-operation might be forthcoming as the masons were a law-abiding society but he stressed that the names and occupations of masons were private matters between them and their local lodge.

But MPs are sceptical that the Grand Secretary could deliver anyway. They are angry that an agreement reached last November to resolve the dispute was overturned by the masons' 50-strong Board of General Purposes.

Commander Higham is to take early retirement later this year.

Mr Mullin and other MPs

Sketch, page 2

## BBC told to advertise for new breed of governor

John Mulholland  
Media Editor

ADVERTISEMENTS to recruit a new breed of BBC governor will be placed in national newspapers over the next two weeks, the Culture Secretary Chris Smith announced last night.

The unprecedented move came as Mr Smith promised measures to make the BBC's current board more accountable to parliament and public. The recruitment campaign signals an end to the previous practice of recruiting the great and the good.

Mr Smith said that advertising the jobs — to fill vacancies for three governors — would make the process "more open and transparent".

The Government hopes to recruit a broader range of people to sit on the board, including more young people and women.

In a move, seen as responding to criticism that the governors have been too relaxed in policing the corporation's increased commercialisation, Mr Smith said: "There are no formal mechanisms for the governors to make the BBC accountable to the public. No sense, not enough sense, that these are people who are there to uphold the public interest."

He told a meeting of the

Broadcasting Press Guild that the BBC had improved its accountability in the last five years, but added: "They are doing a lot better, but there is room for improvement."

He said: "Most of the changes made at the BBC in the last 5-10 years have improved the efficiency of the BBC. I suspect not all of the decisions have improved the efficiency of the BBC."

The Government intends to introduce more regular meetings between the governors, chaired by Sir Christopher Bland, and ministers. Additionally, Mr Smith may make them report annually to the Commons select committee on broadcasting.

A BBC spokesman said: "A lot has been done in the last few years. We've talked about it, but we'll be doing in the future and there is still room to do more."

"In the last few years the BBC has held regular consultation exercises, listening strategies and governors' seminars on a range of topics. We have recognised the need for more consultation."

Mr Smith's comments came on the day that the governors were set to approve a plan to sell off BBC Resources, its production facilities and studios.

This decision was planned last year but held over amid fears that the move was being

rushed through without adequate consultation. Asked if he would approve the governors' proposal — to sell it off as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the corporation — Mr Smith said: "I will wish to see representative of BECU and other relevant names working at the BBC before reaching a conclusion."

He added: "I want to make sure that this cannot be used as a ramp for privatisation of the organisation."

The BBC last night denied it had drifted from its public service remit. "Public service is at the heart of everything we do and stand for," the spokesman said.



Chris Smith: wants more young people on board

### Inside

#### Britain

A senior Conservative MP has been sentenced to 2 months' jail for sexually assaulting a teenage girl he had just baptised.

#### World News

A Russian politician has been sentenced to 10 years in prison for the murder of a Moscow lawyer.

#### Analysis

The British government's decision to sell off BBC Resources is a major step towards privatisation.

#### Finance

Food chains are to merge in a £1.2 billion deal, creating Britain's fifth largest supermarket group.

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# Clinton on defensive as Annan flies to Iraq

Iran Black  
Diplomatic Editor

**P**RESIDENT Bill Clinton was forced on the defensive on the Iraq crisis last night, seeking to build bridges with France on the eve of today's make-or-break mission to Baghdad by the United Nations secretary-general.

Saying he hoped for a "peaceful and principled end" to the dispute over UN weapons inspections, Mr Clinton added: "I think an overwhelming majority of Americans want a peaceful resolution of this. But if it's necessary for us to act, I believe America will do what it always does: I believe it will unite, just as we did in 1991."

The president's remarks, made as the US continued its military build-up with new troops arriving in Kuwait, were designed to respond to concerns raised on Wednesday at a forum in Ohio where his senior foreign policy advisers were briefed.

And with anxiety growing in London that the government has not got across its message about the need for military action if Saddam Hussein does not back down, Tony Blair told Mr Annan that "the threat of force is real" and that there should be "no fudging" in Baghdad.

With 30 ships and 300 warplanes massed in the Gulf, the US and Britain are feeling the pressure of the enormous expectations generated by the UN chief's last-ditch mission, though both insisted he be given the narrowest of briefs and no latitude to negotiate.

Diplomats said high-profile contact yesterday between Mr Clinton and the French president, Jacques Chirac, was intended to underline Washington's concern that Paris — reluctant to back military action — accepts that Baghdad must give way.

The two presidents urged Iraq to make "the necessary gestures" and both expressed "their preference for a diplomatic solution".

Later, after meeting Mr Annan in Paris, Mr Chirac said: "I call upon Iraq to accept the proposals of the secretary-general... because these are the proposals of the whole in-

ternational community... I hope that wisdom and reason will prevail."

Russia, even more strongly opposed to force, said there was "a considerable chance for peace" after President Boris Yeltsin's envoy, Viktor Posolavsky, handed President Saddam a letter.

Mr Blair's spokesman disclosed that the prime minister had also received a letter from Mr Yeltsin, saying that on questions of principle "there are no differences between us".

All involved are now preparing for a new and divisive flurry of diplomacy, including a time-consuming British proposal for a new UN resolution when Mr Annan reports back to the Security Council, probably next Tuesday. On past performance, President Saddam is likely to give the UN chief just enough to divide the council over whether negotiation has really run its course.

Iran urged the Iraqi leader to "co-operate with Kofi Annan to avoid falling in the trap that has been laid for him". But Saudi Arabia, a key member of the 1991 alliance against Iraq, refused to comment on reports that it has secretly agreed to allow US planes to use its air bases.

UN officials said Mr Annan would arrive in Baghdad by direct flight from Paris this afternoon and begin talks tomorrow. He will meet President Saddam personally, two of his top aides, Shashi Tharoor, an Indian, and Rolf Goran Knutsson of Sweden, flew in from Bahrain yesterday to prepare the ground.

In Baghdad, the vice-president, Taha Yassin Ramadan, said his country would work "very positively" with Mr Annan. But 29 UN staff pulled out and crossed into Jordan as a precaution against attack.

The US and Britain, two of the five permanent members of the Security Council, have threatened air strikes if Iraq fails to allow unfettered access to suspected biological and chemical weapons sites. But the other three, Russia, France and China, say the use of force would be counterproductive and destabilise the Middle East.

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Robin Cook, page 12;  
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Showing the flag... Sir Jocelyn Stevens hoists the English Heritage emblem at Tewkesbury on the spot 'stained with the blood of English soldiers'

## Heritage knight in battlefield fray

**Paul Brown**  
finds conflict on executive home front in Tewkesbury

**S**IR JOCELYN STEVENS stood on the spot "stained with the blood of English soldiers" yesterday and declared that if the second battle of Tewkesbury was lost then a whole chapter of English history would be at risk.

Sir Jocelyn, the chairman of English Heritage, denounced Tewkesbury Borough Council as an "absolute disgrace" for backing a plan by Bryant Homes to build 51 £200,000 four-bedroom executive-style homes over what he said was the centre of the battlefield in Gloucestershire where on May 4, 1471, the Lancastrians were decisively defeated by the Yorkists during the Wars of the Roses.

While he was getting thoroughly worked up for the fight, the enemy, in the form of Chris Shaw, the di-

### Clash of arms

English Heritage battlefields under threat

- 1066 Stamford Bridge, near York, (King Harold repels Vikings)
- 1266 Evesham, Worcestershire, (Simon de Montfort killed)
- 1346 Neville's Cross, Durham, (Edward III defeated the Scots)
- 1471 Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, (Wars of the Roses)
- 1485 Bosworth, Leicestershire, (Richard III killed)
- 1640 Newbarn Ford, Tyne and Wear, (Civil War)
- 1643 Newbury, Berkshire, (Civil War)
- 1645 Naseby, Northamptonshire, (Civil War)
- 1648 Preston, Lancashire (Civil War)



action took place further north, in an area already developed.

Certainly Bloddy Meadow, where Edward IV's troops cut down the Lancastrians, is a few hundred yards away, and a final scene of slaughter was outside the abbey where defeated troops tried to seek sanctuary.

Dr Andrew Brown, English Heritage's expert on battlefield conservation, disagrees with Mr Shaw's assessment. He said historical evidence provides a great deal of detail and that medieval chroniclers talk of "foul land and deep dikes, with hills and valleys, a right evil place to have been devised". Gastons Field is mentioned in every contemporary account of events as being central to the action.

The evidence will be carefully sifted during a planning inquiry into the housing application, called in by the Department of the Environment after the local council was "minded" to give Bryant the go-ahead.

For Sir Jocelyn, the dispute over the 10 acres that remain of the original 40-acre Gastons Field is a test case. Tewkesbury is on a

logical evidence suggested the bloodbath was elsewhere. Mr Shaw believes that while Queen Margaret and her troops may have camped on the site before the battle, the heat of the

logical evidence suggested the bloodbath was elsewhere. Mr Shaw believes that while Queen Margaret and her troops may have camped on the site before the battle, the heat of the

## T-bone martyr ready for roasting

Pub landlord faces England's first beef-on-bone prosecution

Luke Harding

**L**ANDLORD Alan Coomber was on a day off when a casually dressed couple strolled into his pub and ordered two large T-bone steaks.

His staff noticed nothing suspicious — in fact, the "couple" scooped the steaks off their plates and placed them in plastic bags. Then they asked for a receipt.

Yesterday Mr Coomber was resigned to the prospect of becoming England's first beef martyr. Since the Government outlawed beef on the bone three months ago, he has openly defied the ban at his 12th century pub, The Bell Inn, in the village of Iden, near Rye in East Sussex. Two days ago the authorities — in the form of the undercover duo of environmental health inspectors from the local council — caught up with him.

"It was a bit like a Scotland Yard job," said Mr Coomber. "The girl in the kitchen asked, 'Is everything OK?' because they weren't eating their steaks. They put the

steaks in a plastic bag, flashed their ID cards, and left."

He added: "I don't think I'm being victimised. It was inevitable really. My gripe is with the ministry that put the ban on in the first place. It is absolutely ridiculous."

Mr Coomber, aged 52, a former fireman who runs the pub with his wife Gwen, will now become the first person in England to be prosecuted for flouting Agriculture Secretary Jack Cunningham's new law. Rother Council in Bexhill yesterday signalled it intended to go ahead with court action.

Two weeks ago the council had sent the landlord a stiff letter warning that selling T-bone steaks for human consumption constituted a serious criminal offence and that he faced the prospect of a £5,000 fine or up to two years in prison if he persisted. "That man had been warned and that's it really," an irritated council spokesman said. "We have a duty to enforce the new regulations."

Mr Coomber, however, is undeterred. He will continue to sell 16oz and 28oz T-bone



Alan Coomber: "It was a bit like a Scotland Yard job"

steaks to customers and has set up a fighting fund to cover his legal costs. The search, meanwhile, for what he describes as a "sensible" solicitor has begun.

"People have been fed here since the 12th century. The monks used to brew the beer and feed travellers on their way from the Cinque Ports to London," the landlord said. "Now I could be thrown in prison. T-bone steak isn't a drug. It isn't addictive. This is crazy. It is a serious criminal offence. What could be more laughable."

The two offending steaks have been sent for analysis. When the lab results come back Mr Coomber is likely to be summoned before a magistrates court.

Sales of steak remain brisk, helped by a warm tide of favourable media publicity. "We sell around 40 steaks each week," he said.

"We have waived it under their noses for three weeks," Mr Coomber said philosophically. "Now we wait to get the summons."

Mr Coomber is thought to be only the second person to face charges for allegedly breaking the ban, which was introduced after scientists concluded there was a small chance that beef on the bone could transmit BSE to humans.

Scottish hotelier Jim Sutherland, aged 44, who owns a hotel in the borders, last week said he had been summoned to appear at Selkirk sheriff court on March 10.

The move, criticised by the Conservatives, followed a high-profile dinner at the hotel on December 22, attended by 170 people, at which rib of beef was allegedly served. The meal, at the Carfraemill Hotel in Lander, was free, and was dished up six days after the ban was introduced.

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If Mo Mowlam expels Sinn Fein, it will be with the heaviest reluctance and the highest of motives — and a risk of permanent regret. Why the Secretary of State must take another risk

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# Ministers stop blaming the legacy of the Tories as Government fails to meet key manifesto pledge to cut queues for hospital treatment

## NHS waiting list nears record 1.3m

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

**M**INISTERS yesterday stopped blaming the Conservatives' legacy for the continuing rise in hospital waiting lists as Frank Dobson, the Health Secretary, admitted that the latest figures were bad.

As the waiting list for England rose by 4.5 per cent in a quarter to a new record approaching 1.3 million, Mr Dobson said: "I have got to take some responsibility for them."

However, the increase was predictable because he had ordered the NHS to give priority to emergency and urgent cases this winter. "If you are dealing with the emergencies, you can't generally

speaking put as much effort into the waiting-list cases." The figures at December 31 are doubly embarrassing for the Government. One of Labour's five 'early pledges' made before the general election, was to "cut NHS waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients".

In fact, the total list has risen by almost 108,000 since the election. Moreover, the number of patients waiting more than a year is rising rapidly — up 19 per cent in a quarter to 68,300 at the end of December. Of those, 974 had been waiting more than 18 months, in breach of the Patient's Charter guarantee.

Mr Dobson insisted that the Government would meet its promise to reduce the list to below the figure it had inherited. That would have been achieved "at the next election". The NHS would also



meet the commitment he gave last November that, by the end of March, no patient would have been waiting longer than 18 months.

**'I have got to take some responsibility. If you are dealing with emergencies, you can't put as much effort into waiting lists'**

— Frank Dobson (left)

A snapshot survey last month had shown that 80 per cent of those waiting 18 months already had treatment dates before the end of

### The long wait

England, at December 31, 1997

% rise since September 30

Region	% rise since September 30	Number
South Thames	5.5	195,420
North Thames	5.3	185,120
North West	2.9	183,150
South & West	6.4	158,000
North & Yorks	2.5	149,580
Anglia & Oxford	8.5	131,000
Trent	3.4	129,080
West Midlands	5.9	110,920
Total	4.5	1,262,260

March. "That is the kind of progress we are committed to achieving."

The December figures show the numbers waiting have been rising fastest in the south and west health regions, followed by West Midlands. Stephen Day, brought in by Mr Dobson last

autumn to head a waiting list action team, was chosen because of the success he had in cutting waiting in the West Midlands.

The figures will be used by health ministers to press the Treasury for more money for the NHS next year. Reports have suggested they are asking for an extra £500 million, which would make a total of £2 billion a year more since the election.

Dr Sandy Macara, chairman of the British Medical Association, said: "The fact that the figures are rising despite the best efforts of NHS staff, despite the extra winter money and despite the mid weather, simply highlights the urgent need to improve the financial base of the service."

John Maples, the shadow health secretary, said the next figures would "worsen

considerably" because the Government had cancelled many hospital operating lists this winter to avoid a beds crisis.

"By May, Labour will have been running the NHS for nearly a year and will have no excuses for the appalling distress and suffering that these waits are causing for patients."

Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat health spokesman, said: "Frank Dobson said in the House of Commons that bringing down waiting lists was like turning round a supertanker, but he doesn't even seem to have his hand on the tiller yet."

"With waiting lists growing faster than ever, the NHS is rapidly turning into Labour's Titanic."

Analysis page 11; Leader comment, page 13

## Sex abuse priest gets 21 months jail

Geoffrey Gibbs

**A** ROMAN Catholic priest was sentenced to 21 months imprisonment and ordered to register as a sex offender on his release after being found guilty of sexually abusing a teenage girl he had just baptised.

Father John Lloyd, a priest for 32 years, was convicted of the indecent assault during his trial at Cardiff crown court last week.

Sentencing him yesterday, Mr Justice Rougier told the 57-year-old that there could be few grosser breaches of trust than when a priest sexually abused a child.

"I find the description of what you did to that girl almost unbelievable. You were entrusted with the task of baptising her, a ceremony which I have always understood is regarded as one of very spiritual significance."

"Yet within 10 minutes of that you are giving her a most unwelcome introduction to the nastier aspects of the sins of the flesh."

Lloyd, a former press spokesman for the Archbishop of Cardiff, carried out the attack at his home in 1974 after baptising the 13-year-old girl into the Catholic faith at St Dyfrig's church, Treforest, Glamorgan, south Wales.

The victim, now a 37-year-

old married woman, told the court she froze during the assault in which Lloyd told her to sit on his lap and moved his hand up her leg.

She complained to police more than 20 years later following press reports that the priest had been arrested for another alleged sex attack.

A jury last week acquitted Lloyd on four charges of rape and seven counts of indecent assault. South Wales Police said yesterday that after consultations with the Crown Prosecution Service, a retrial

was ruled out. The Crown Prosecution Service, a retrial

was ruled out. The Crown Prosecution Service, a retrial

was ruled out. The Crown Prosecution Service, a retrial

was ruled out. The Crown Prosecution Service, a retrial

was ruled out. The Crown Prosecution Service, a retrial

ruined man with a bleak future. "His normal life ceased over a year ago and the overwhelming probability is that it will not begin again."

The inevitable prison sentence will in effect mean the ruin of this man of 57 who has contributed thousands of good and caring hours to others but has been found on one occasion nearly 24 years ago to be unable to suppress an illicit desire."

Passing sentence, Mr Justice Rougier said he had taken account of Lloyd's age and the number of witnesses who had given evidence in his support.

But there was little that could mitigate what Lloyd had done.

The judge said he was "constrained" by the maximum sentence of two years at the time of the offence in 1974.

He told Lloyd: "You will have to register as a sex offender. You will have to register your name and place of address with the police after your release."

● Father Thomas Doherty, a gay alcoholic Roman Catholic priest who seduced a teenage boy into a sexual relationship, was jailed for six years at Leeds crown court yesterday.

The former priest at St Joseph's church in Todmorden, west Yorkshire, had denied two charges of indecent assault, one of attempted buggery, when the boy was aged 14 and 15.



Father John Lloyd who was jailed for abusing a teenage girl PHOTOGRAPH BY BARRY BATELSON

## Unions condemn sickness claims agency sell-off

David Brindle

**T**HE Government last night announced the £300 million privatisation of the Benefits Agency Medical Service, responsible for advice and tests on claims for sickness and disability benefits.

The move, which had been fought strongly by civil service unions, will fuel the controversy already raging over welfare provision for long-term sick and disabled people.

Barry Reamsbottom, general secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association, said: "We have worked hard to try to convince ministers that this was one Tory privatisation plan they should not have continued with. We still believe it is all wrong."

"The private sector, and the profit motive, should have no involvement in determining the rights of sick and disabled people to benefit."

The medical service, which employs 1,200 administrative staff and 220 Civil Service doctors, is to be taken over by Sema Group, the Anglo-French computer services company, on a five-year contract worth £305 million with an option to extend for a further two years.

Sema has been awarded all three geographical contracts on offer. Almost four in 10 of the service's administrative staff have elected to follow the agency to Sema, but not all of them will be given the option to seek transfer to the company.

The bulk of medical tests for benefit claims will continue to be carried out by more than 3,000 non-Civil Service doctors.

Keith Bradley, junior social security minister, said the privatisation decision was unrelated to the issue of welfare reform. It was about utilising private-sector expertise to get a better deal for claimants and taxpayers.

"As we have previously said, this would be a government of ideas and ideals, but not of outdated ideology. What counts is what works."

There was "no reason why a service should be delivered directly if more efficient means are available", Mr Bradley added.

The Government says payments to Sema will have no link to the outcomes of medical tests. Rigorous arrangements will be put in place to ensure that advice remains independent and objective.

The decision not to drop the privatisation, proposed by the last government, was taken last summer when it was resolved also to go ahead with disposal of all Department of Social Security properties.

have expressed a preference for a high demand school will be placed in a failing or unsatisfactory school as a result of the policy. The local education authority will be expected to enhance provision at high demand schools to ensure this does not happen," he said.

Mr Byers said there would be extra resources for rural areas to stop schools transferring surplus children to classes with spare places in distant villages.

## Seat-belts 'could have saved' coach crash pupils

Bereaved parents appeal for tighter legislation across Europe

David Ward

**T**HREE teenagers who died in a coach crash while on a school trip to the French Alps could have lived if the bus had been fitted with seat-belts, an inquest heard yesterday.

Robert Boardman, aged 14,

Nicola Moore, 15, and Keith Riddling, 16, pupils at St James's high school in Bolton, Greater Manchester, were killed when the bus left a remote mountain road and plunged into a ravine last July.

The inquest was told that pupils were switched to a local left-hand drive vehicle

without belts when the British bus with belts, which had taken them from Bolton to France, broke down.

Dr David Bisset, the pathologist who carried out post-mortems, was asked three times if they would have lived if they had been wearing belts.

Three times he replied: "It is highly likely that if the children were restrained by belts, their injuries would have been far less serious."

The mothers of Robert and Keith sobbed as he gave his opinion. Verdicts of accidental death were later recorded.

In a statement after the hearing, the parents said: "We were told that the coach had seat-belts fitted. We did not know that the holiday company hired smaller coaches without seat-belts to take the youngsters out on activities."

They appealed for European governments to tighten legislation. "We don't want to see this happen again and would ask all parents to get a written statement from their child's school, scout group or any organisation on their policy regarding transport and seat-belts, not just in this country but also abroad."

The inquest heard that one of the parents had checked that the coach that left Bolton had belts.

David Bowes, the headteacher, supported the parents' claim. "We put our faith and trust in a tour operator which the school had used two years previously and we took it on trust that there would be seat-belts on the coaches."

The inquest was also told that Jim Shaw, the driver of the bus, had never driven a left-hand drive vehicle before and had just 25 minutes practice before taking pupils on a rock-climbing exercise.

Mr Shaw, who was at the hearing, was fined £1,250 by a French court after pleading guilty to manslaughter.

Mr Tomlinson said they would be free to distribute the reports to parents.

Ministers are likely to be pressed to enforce publication, but Ofsted thinks many parents would find the reports hard to understand in their present form.

The Pandas will include benchmark performance targets developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. These show that a typical comprehensive with less than 5 per cent of pupils on free meals gets 82 per cent of pupils through GCSE with five passes at grades A\*-C.

The equivalent pass rate for one with more than 35 per cent on free meals is 20 per cent. Grammar schools should score 96 per cent, while the average for secondary moderns is 27 per cent.

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## Family feud ruling overturned on appeal

Claire Dyer, Legal Correspondent

**A** HIGH Court ruling that the head of a leading Iranian Jewish family in Britain must pay his son more than £1 million, including interest and legal costs, was overturned yesterday by the Court of Appeal.

The judgment is the latest in a family feud dating from the early 1980s.

The court held that a ruling by the Chief Rabbi's court, the Beth Din, that the son was due the money under a deal to smuggle carpets out of post-revolution Iran was unenforceable because the agreement itself was illegal.

Sion Soleimany, aged 78, and his eldest son, Abner Soland, 48, have been caught up in what one judge described as "a protracted and vicious quarrel". The two men own separate shops a few doors apart in Mayfair, central London, but have not spoken to each other for years. Mr Soleimany is a carpet dealer and Mr Soland runs an interior design business.

The court also lifted an injunction freezing Mr Soleimany's assets which has limited him to £350 a week living expenses for 5½ years.

The court refused Mr Soland leave to appeal to the House of Lords. He will have to pay his father's costs, estimated at £500,000. His solicitors said they would consider whether to petition the Lords for leave to appeal.

Mr Soleimany said he would be happy to welcome his son back into the family. Mr Soland declined to comment.

**'I am relieved that this unhappy affair has reached some degree of finality'**

ment but his solicitor, Carol Mulcahy, said: "Subject to any right of appeal, my client is relieved that this unhappy affair has now reached some degree of finality. He has always accepted the authority of the English courts to determine the issue of enforceability and has done everything in his power to bring the issue before the court at the earliest opportunity."

In 1980 Mr Soland went to Iran at his father's request to help free a consignment of carpets seized by Iranian customs. While there he realised there were substantial profits to be made by exporting Persian carpets, but export was illegal under Iranian revenue and export control laws.

Mr Soland arranged for diplomats to smuggle out carpets. As a result of his activities he spent nine months in jail in Iran.

He claimed that his father owed him a share of the profits on the carpets. Mr Soleimany claimed that his son's transactions were "disastrous" and had inflicted substantial losses on him.

The dispute split the family, but Mr Soland could not take it to the ordinary civil courts because of the long-standing principle of English law that the courts will not enforce an illegal contract. In 1990 father and son agreed to ask the Beth Din to try to resolve it.

The Beth Din is a low-profile court often used by Jews to settle disputes discreetly. Cases are heard by rabbis, and under Jewish law the fact that a contract is illegal has no effect on rights between the parties.

The Beth Din ruled that Mr Soleimany must pay his son £576,000.

## Ofsted prods sleepy schools with new table

John Carvel, Education Editor

**S**TATE schools in England are to be given performance indicators showing how their results measure up to schools with poor raw scores will continue to attract criticism from ministers, the adjusted figures may start to bring pressure on suburban and rural under-achievement, Ofsted said in improvement was needed in 31 per cent of the most prosperous primaries — those with a tiny proportion of free children on free school meals, the most accurate yardstick of deprivation.

The Pandas will be sent next week to 24,000 schools.

called Pandas — Performance and Assessment reports. Headteachers will be given data from inspection reports, test and exam performance and teacher assessment results, showing how the school meets the challenge of its "social and economic environment".

Although inner-city schools with poor raw scores will continue to attract criticism from ministers, the adjusted figures may start to bring pressure on suburban and rural under-achievement, Ofsted said in improvement was needed in 31 per cent of the most prosperous primaries — those with a tiny proportion of free children on free school meals, the most accurate yardstick of deprivation.

The Pandas will be sent next week to 24,000 schools.

## Passengers rail at poor privatised train services

Virgin among seven firms found to have declining levels of performance

Sharrin Nicoll

**V**IRGIN Rail, Richard Branson's heavily criticised train service, received another battering from passengers yesterday when OFRAF, the industry franchising body, released its figures on customer satisfaction.

Children's Railways and Gatwick Express also failed to meet passenger expectations in a set of figures that were described as a "mess" by a rail users' pressure group.

Passengers travelling on Virgin's west coast line from London to Glasgow complained that seat availability, journey information and the refreshment service had all declined in the last six months.

The figures test customers' satisfaction on a variety of issues from punctuality to facilities and cleanliness. They then compare the figures with a benchmark established by initial surveys carried out shortly after the franchises were granted.

On the Chiltern line, operated by M40 Trains, which runs from Marylebone in London to Birmingham, passengers reported a decline in service in 14 out of the 15 categories.

A spokesman for Chiltern said that although the company was concerned by the fall, 91 per cent of customers were satisfied by the service. M40's benchmark is to keep 94 per cent of customers happy.

The Gatwick Express, which takes thousands of holidaymakers to the airport from Victoria every day, also took a hit when passengers said the speed of ticket purchases, seat availability, cleanliness and refreshments had all declined.

Each of the 19 companies which reported to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising agreed their benchmarks with OFRAF using individual methodologies which make it hard to compare one company with another.

In general 10 services have improved, seven have worsened and two have stayed roughly the same.

South West Trains failed to reach its benchmark in nine out of 12 areas of service. North Western trains failed in seven out of eight categories while West Anglia Great Northern improved its figures in two of its six categories.

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## 6 BRITAIN

# Tenant farmers to challenge county land sales

Peter Hetherington

TENANT farmers fearing for their livelihoods are planning a legal challenge to a decision by North Yorkshire county council to sell 11,000 acres of land in an attempt to raise millions of pounds to repay debts and fund services.

Leaders of the council's 126 tenants are consulting lawyers in the hope of applying for a judicial review amid growing concern that other counties will follow North Yorkshire's example in what could amount to a huge national land sale.

Around the country, councils own almost 350,000 acres of farmland containing 5,700 tenanted farms and small holdings — many created to provide work after the two world wars.

Some of the North Yorkshire land, which has been valued at 200 million, could be sold for house building, quarrying, or other commercial uses — raising fears among amenity groups that several attractive areas could be under threat.

The sale decision by the Conservative-controlled council has been bitterly criticised by several rebel Tories, the

Liberal Democrats and the Tenant Farmers' Association which is planning the legal challenge.

One Tory described the sale as a "dash for cash" for purely short-term gain. The 11,000 acres raise £750,000 a year in rent.

George Dunn, chief executive of the Tenant Farmers' Association, said the council had no moral authority to sell land bought at knock-down prices in the 1920s and 1930s.

**'Big businesses will milk the land then move on. It will be disastrous'**

— and sometimes given away — to encourage the low paid and the unemployed into farming.

But David Ashton, leader of North Yorkshire council, said the county's farming estate was giving a poor return on a big investment. "A substantial sum will be raised over a number of years to help services which have been badly hit by budget cuts," he said.

Anne Dunning, whose husband Harold had been expecting to take over his

father's 100-acre holding, said many tenants feared that some of the land would be devoted to "prairie farming" in future.

"We will lose a patchwork of fields that have characterised traditional farming for generations and the big agribusinesses will come in, milk the land for a short time, then move on. It will be disastrous environmentally."

North Yorkshire's claim that its landholding has outlived its purpose is challenged by several other counties, which view the sale decision with horror.

In Cambridgeshire, which has the biggest farming estate in the country — 480 farms on 42,000 acres — the county council says there is a continuing demand for its holdings. Fifty-five new tenancies had been agreed since 1990.

Elliott Morley, a junior agriculture minister, said this week that the Government planned to end a special inducement introduced by the last government to encourage councils to sell farms.

Labour, he maintained, believed county council smallholdings still had an important role to play.

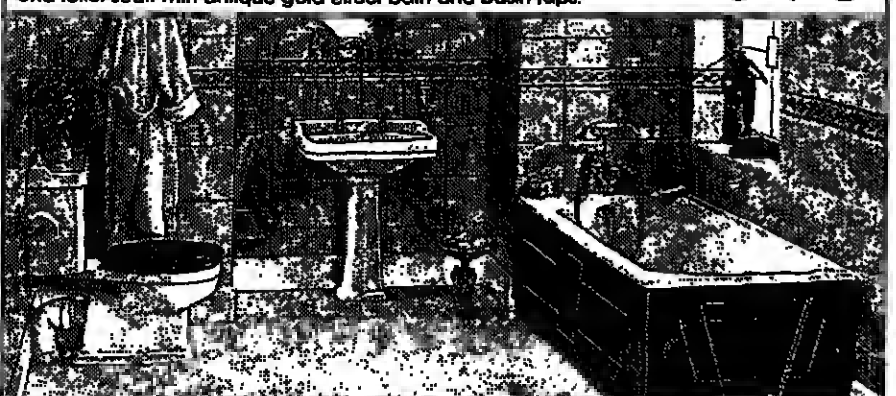
In North Yorkshire the council estimates it would take £10 to 20 years to dispose of the farms.

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## A good-old-fashioned cuppa



A very rare 18th century teapot, part of the Goddard Lowerhouse porcelain collection which has recently been acquired by Christchurch Mansion Museum in Ipswich.  
PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID MANSILL

## Parents 'not told' son could be alive

Owen Bowcott

THE parents of Christopher Howes, the British mines expert missing in Cambodia, yesterday said they were "hurt and disappointed" not to have been shown an official report suggesting he was still alive last June.

But the Foreign Office insisted that the family had been told everything which appeared in the internal seven-page document at the time it was being compiled.

Until yesterday it was believed that Mr Howes, a former Royal Engineer and Falklands veteran, was probably killed shortly after being captured by the Khmer Rouge on March 25, 1976, in northern Cambodia.

His father, Roy Howes, aged 70, and his wife Betty, who live in Backwell, near Bristol, have asked the Foreign Office for an explanation. They have also sent a copy of the confidential report — commissioned by Paul Reddcliffe, Britain's ambassador to Cambodia — to their local MP, Liam Fox, a former minister at the Foreign Office.

The document was prepared by a leading expert on the Khmer Rouge, David Ashley, of the UN Centre for Human Rights, who says it is likely that Christopher, then 37 and working with the Mines Advisory Group charity, was killed shortly after being taken hostage.

But the paper also says a Cambodian border official reported Christopher Howes was alive in June last year. "This is the first time we had heard that he might be alive last June," Roy Howes said.

"I appreciate that it was prepared for the ambassador. But it is also about our son and we think we should have been told."

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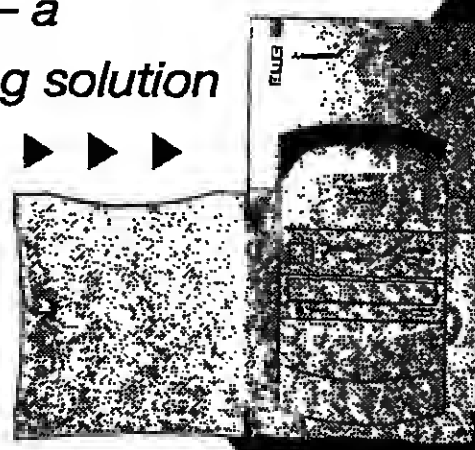
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## News in brief

### Boy rapist gets four years custody

A JUDGE at Cardiff crown court yesterday sentenced a 14-year-old rapist to four years custody for a sex attack on a 12-year-old girl drunk on Pimms. He was just 13 when he raped the girl in a disused garage.

Mr Justice Ruggier said: "It's very sad to send someone your age to custody. What you did to that girl was appalling."

Prosecutor Geraint Walters told how the girl had drunk the most of a bottle of Pimms while out with friends near her home in Swansea, West Glamorgan.

A couple found the girl in their garden at 10.30pm. Mr Walters said: "She was shouting pitifully for her mother. Her face and clothing were caked in mud and her shoes, tights and underwear were missing."

When arrested the boy said: "This is sad, I never raped her. I'm only 13, I am a child." He claimed she consented.

### Green top milk fails test

A FIFTH of samples of unpasteurised milk tested by the Government's Public Health Laboratory Service were of unacceptable quality, according to a letter in today's British Medical Journal.

The green top milk samples failed to meet hygiene levels or contained harmful bacteria, including campylobacter, salmonella and E coli 0157, during checks between May 1996 and June 1997.

Ministers plan to extend the existing ban on green top milk in Scotland to England and Wales. John de Louvois, head of the public health lab's environmental surveillance unit, and Anita Rampling, chairman of its dairy products working group, say: "We must conclude that the continuing availability of unpasteurised milk on retail sale constitutes an unacceptable risk to public health."

— James Melville

### Water leak set BA jet rolling

A BRITISH Airways jet went into a series of uncontrolled rolls at 20,000ft after water — possibly from a lavatory — contaminated the electronics, according to an accident report released yesterday.

The captain of the Boeing 737 issued a mayday call during the incident near Bournemouth, Dorset, on a test flight in 1995.

The rolls continued for seven minutes, but stopped when the crew brought the aircraft down to 7,500ft. It landed safely at Gatwick, the Air Accidents Investigation Branch report said.

The report said the systems had been contaminated by "an unidentified fluid". Seven months earlier a fluid leak which was traced to the forward toilet sink drain had been reported.

### Asbestos damages increased

A BUSINESSMAN suffering from an asbestos-related disease yesterday had his damages award increased to £749,795 — the highest ever compensation for the condition.

The Court of Appeal increased Bryan Ward's award from £440,157, made in July 1996, and said the sum could go up even more if his progressive lung disease developed into mesothelioma or lung cancer. The award almost doubles the previous highest figure of £400,000.

Mr Ward, 48, of Doncaster, South Yorkshire, spent his early working life, between 17 and 27, employed by Newalls Insulation Co Ltd and Cape Contracts Ltd. As a result of its admitted negligence, he was exposed to asbestos.

### Teacher found hanged

A TEACHER at Nevill Holt School near Market Harborough, Leicestershire, was found hanged yesterday by police who wanted to interview him about sex assaults on former pupils.

Detectives were unable to find the man when they went to the fee-paying school to interview him as part of inquiries into allegations of sex abuse after a former teacher was remanded in custody accused of sex attacks on boys.

After a search his body was found hanging from a tree. He was certified dead at the scene. Police said there were no suspicious circumstances.

Edmund Clements, 59, a former teacher, is in custody accused of 14 charges of gross indecency, 13 of indecent assault and three of inciting a child to commit gross indecency, between 1971 and 1978.

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# UK electoral laws 'violate free speech'

Clare Dyer  
Legal Correspondent

**T**HE Government will be forced to change Britain's electoral laws after a European Court of Human Rights ruling yesterday that they violated an anti-abortion campaigner's right to free speech.

The Strasbourg judges said laws banning ordinary citizens' spending money to promote or denigrate candidates in election campaigns breached article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.

The decision was a victory for the leading anti-abortion campaigner Phyllis Bowman, executive director of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children. She said: "For years candidates have deliberately deceived electors, saying how they felt about abortion. Our leaflet said how they would vote or how they had voted. Our people would interview them and if they refused to be seen we would say they had refused."

She was prosecuted under the 1983 Representation of the People Act for trying to influence an election campaign by distributing 25,000 leaflets in Halifax, West Yorkshire, during the 1992 general election, setting out for voters the views on abortion of the three main candidates.

Mrs Bowman, aged 72, was charged under the act with a "corrupt electoral practice" by spending £10,000 on producing election material without authorisation. Mrs Bowman, who had been convicted and fined for similar offences during the 1979 Ilford North by-election and the Euro elections in 1982, was acquitted on the third occasion because

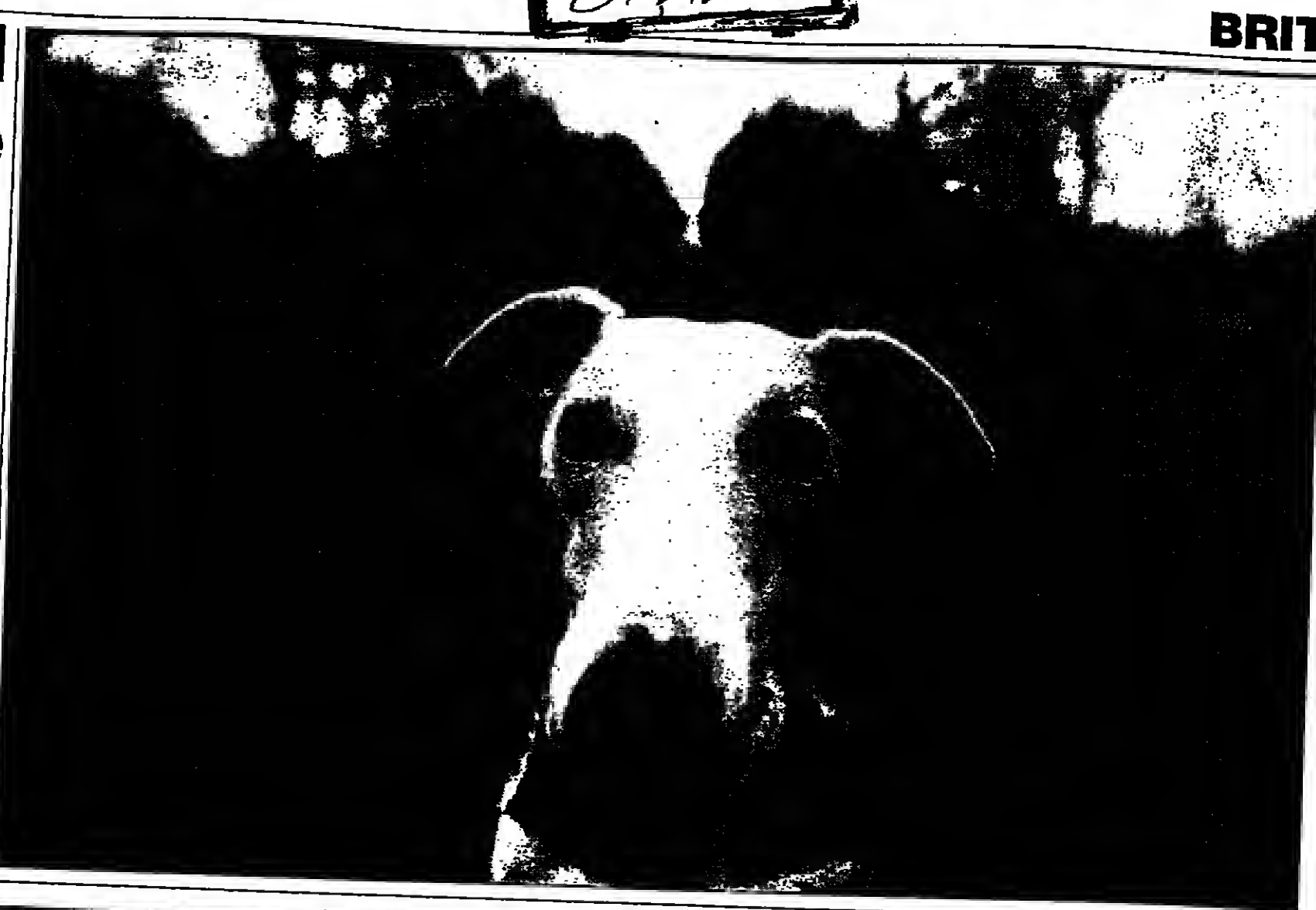
the case was brought outside the 12-month time limit. She took her case to Strasbourg, claiming damages for the "stigma, stress and anxiety" she has suffered, plus legal costs, as a result of being prosecuted. Her claim for damages was rejected, but she was awarded £1,833.64 for legal costs in Britain and £25,000 for Strasbourg costs.

The judges said the 1983 act did not directly restrain freedom of expression, but it limited to £5 the amount of money "unauthorised persons" could spend on publications and "other means of communication" during the election.

It did not restrict spending on the transmission of information or opinions in general, but only those "during the relevant period with a view to promoting or procuring the election of a candidate".

The limit applied only during the four to six weeks before the general election, allowing Mrs Bowman to campaign freely at any other time. "However, this would not, in the court's view, have served her purpose in publishing the leaflets which was, at the very least, to inform the people of Halifax about the three candidates' voting records and attitudes on abortion, during the critical period when their minds were focused on their choice of representative," the judgment said.

The court was, moreover, not convinced that in practice she had access to any other effective channels of communication. "The result was that the law was a total barrier to Mrs Bowman's publishing information with a view to influencing the voters of Halifax in favour of an anti-abortion candidate."



Eagle, a three-year-old member of an obedience team of whippets, during preparations for Crafts 1998, which opens at the NEC in Birmingham on March 5. PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM TURNER

## School report

87% of children like their teachers
63% of children happy with either male or female teachers
75% of children think their teachers like them
72% think that best teachers in the country should be given an award
● Favourite subjects (among older children aged 10-15): Sport 25%, Art 18% and Maths 16%
● Least favourite subject (among younger children aged 7-9): Maths 27%, English 18% and science 10%
● Celebrity most children think should be sent back to school: Liam Gallagher 25%, Chris Evans 22% and Paul Gascoigne 17%
● Famous people children would like to see as their teacher: Alan Shearer 32%, Baby Spice 25%, David Beckham 21%, Jeremy Paxman 1%

## Spice and football come top of class

Children choose celebrities as ideal teachers, reports Vivek Chaudhary

**S**HE could hardly be described as the brain of Britain and he has spent most of his life kicking a ball around a football pitch.

But if the nation's schoolchildren had a choice over who they would like as their teacher, then girls would opt for Baby Spice and boys for Alan Shearer.

According to a survey on what children think of school life, published today, 36 per cent of girls would choose Baby Spice as a teacher with 32 per cent of boys opting for Newcastle and England striker Shearer.

Fellow footballer David Beckham came third with 21 per cent, while most schoolchildren gave a firm thumbs down to celebrities with brains: only 1 per cent said they would choose Jeremy Paxman or Carol Vorderman.

Around 1,000 children aged seven to 15 took part in the survey, which was commissioned by the Disney Channel as part of this year's launch of its Teacher Of The Year Award.

Researchers questioned children from both private

and state schools around the country.

A spokeswoman for the awards, which will be announced later this year, said: "I suppose the children never properly thought out the idea of having Baby Spice teaching them maths. She is perhaps not the best role model but you would expect children to opt for celebrities in music and sport rather than those in boring professions."

Despite popular conception that children hate their teachers, 87 per cent of those taking part in the survey said they liked them while almost 60 per cent said teachers are people they admire. Over 60 per cent thought of their teachers as kind and easy to understand.

When it comes to homework, 35 per cent said that they were "quite happy" doing it but more girls than boys said they were "very happy" doing it.

Pat Partington, head of the teacher of the year awards committee, said: "One of the most positive results to come to light is that teachers are held in such regard by the majority of pupils."

Last year's teacher of the year award was won by Lynda Roberts. She helped in the recovery of Josie Russell, who survived an attack which killed her mother and sister in the summer of 1996.

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People are suggesting that Bergkamp now looks in the mirror and sees the face of Wright snarling back at him.

Sport98, page 8

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## Iraq crisis

# Whitehall in spin over lack of public support

## Home front

Michael White and Ian Black

AS THE Iraq crisis drags on, Whitehall spin doctors are becoming increasingly frustrated in their struggle to win the propaganda war at home.

Labour is finding that its slick populist techniques do not work so well when the subject is faraway Iraq, rather than hospital waiting lists or classroom sizes. "We're not getting our message across," is a frequent, frantic refrain.

Stung by Maggie O'Kane's Guardian report from a Baghdad hospital yesterday, Number 10 issued a "rebuttal" — in best Millbank style — to remind voters that medical supplies are exempt from United Nations sanctions, and that President Saddam Hussein has been the main block on oil-for-food money.

There is mounting concern that the importance of UN arms inspections — at the heart of the crisis — is not appreciated and that Britain is being portrayed erroneously as the sole military

partner of the United States. But Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's press spokesman and Nigel Sheinwald, the Foreign Office equivalent, have had some success. The Sun reminded readers yesterday of how President Saddam had his own son-in-law murdered in 1995 for revealing the scale of Iraq's chemical weapons programme during a brief escape to the West.

And after finally obtaining the release of US satellite photographs of Iraq's "prestigious" and the Foreign Office. Repetitive background papers on the UN inspections have failed to make an impact, and No 10 officials, unversed in the technical details, have been running to catch up. Some diplomats also have the distinct impression that Mr Blair is more gun-ho than his Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook.

There was a fine line between information and propaganda at a briefing for lobby correspondents last weekend. "We have recently received a report from a reliable source that members of the intelligence and the elite Republican Guard have been trying to rebuild links outside the military and intelligence services, so concerned are they that the present round of confrontations might provoke a popular rising," journalists were told.

George Robertson's Ministry of Defence has been the junior partner, initially discouraging media interest and then changing tack after Mr

Blair's mission to Washington to bolster a beleaguered President Bill Clinton. But it has still offered correspondents only one substantial briefing.

Mr Blair and Mr Cook have used that characteristic device of diplomacy, the high-profile phone call. Mr Blair called the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, yesterday to wish him well in Baghdad.

But the nature of the diplomatic haggles, in which President Saddam is a past master, requires stamina. It is ill-suited to the short attention span of highly competitive media, especially in the television-driven US. If war starts coming in, the US networks will go all-out, but diplomacy is hard to film.

The only Fleet Street newspapers to carry Iraq stories on their front pages yesterday were the Guardian, the Telegraph and Financial Times.

Mr Cook's threat on Wednesday of a "proportional response" against Iraq if it used chemical weapons drew attention, but only because the tabloids went for the ritual — and bogus — "nuclear weapons" angle. Irritated Foreign Office officials had to dampen down the story, but they then compounded the problem by refusing to rule anything out.

**There is concern that Britain is being portrayed erroneously as the sole military partner of the US**

## War jabs pose dilemma

## Protection

David Fairhall  
Defence Correspondent

IF BRITISH troops come under attack from Iraqi anthrax weapons, they will receive quite different protective vaccinations from those suspected as a cause of the mysterious "Gulf war syndrome" afflicting veterans of the 1991 war.

Since then, a licensed British vaccine has become available to replace the American product used seven years ago. More significantly, troops will not receive the whooping cough booster vaccine, which was used last time to accelerate their immunisation.

In late 1990 — just before the desert campaign to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait — the

Department of Health warned the Ministry of Defence against the simultaneous use of anthrax and whooping cough vaccines. The warning came in a message from the DoH, describing tests where mice suffered "serious loss of condition and weight loss" after receiving the combined vaccination.

The MoD went ahead anyway. But the use of multiple vaccines has since emerged as a prime suspect in the search for causes of Gulf war syndrome and is therefore a likely focus of the legal action which is being planned against the MoD. They want direct financial compensation.

The issue of Gulf war syndrome has been embarrassing and irritating for the MoD, even causing a minister unknowingly to mislead Parliament. Last July Labour's Armed Forces Minister, Dr John Reid, vowed "a new be-

ginning" based on complete openness about facts and policy while research continues. But the new Iraqi crisis, bringing the threat of chemical and biological attacks on RAF units posted to Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, has put him in a dilemma.

Should he rush to give British troops every possible protection, as in 1990? Or should he play safe against the possibility of more Gulf war syndrome by holding back?

To make matters worse, the basic British anthrax vaccine, without a booster, takes 32 weeks to provide full immunisation. Even if the whooping cough vaccine is added, a spokesman for the Porton Down research establishment said, it takes eight weeks. So to be fully effective, a decision to vaccinate would have had to be taken long before the troops deployed. Ministers decided to wait

and see. "The current operational circumstances and threat assessment do not at present indicate any need for precautionary medical countermeasures," an official spokesman said. This policy covers Naps anti-nerve gas tablets and organo-phosphate insecticides — also Gulf war syndrome suspects — as well as anthrax vaccinations.

A whooping cough booster was ruled out pending the outcome of further research. In any case there are doubts about its effectiveness. So if Saddam Hussein were to order retaliation with nerve gas or anthrax — an unlikely possibility according to military intelligence — the shore-based British troops would rely on gas masks and protective clothing. If there was some warning, they could be vaccinated, giving limited initial protection, and take anti-nerve gas tablets.



An Iraqi factory guard brandishes his rifle in front of a portrait of Saddam Hussein yesterday. Iraqis await the outcome of an attempt by the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, to avert a US-led military strike. PHOTOGRAPH BY FALAH KHEBER

## Citizen soldiers say no one dares rebel against Saddam

Voices of dissent were crushed after the last Gulf war but Maggie O'Kane in Baghdad hears of fears that remain

HE LIFTS a long red cushion in the corner of his living room. "If the Americans dare come out of their helicopters and put a foot in our country we will stop them with this," he says. Briefly, he reveals a 1970s Kalashnikov before covering it again with the cushion.

Commando Joseph Alia Tarris, aged 48, had his shoulder broken by shrapnel in the Iran-Iraq war. His stiff vertebra was damaged when he was "crushed" by the rebels who rose against Saddam Hussein in 1991, after the Gulf war. Now he is out of retirement to run the Dora suburb military training class from 12pm to 4pm daily, in preparation for the war that "God willing, will not come".

At the al-Quadisiya hospital on the other side of the city, cleaners are taking part in the 2pm military training shift. Their coach is a gruff 40-year-old man named Hassar, who was in the room, cocks her empty Kalashnikov, holds her breath and squeezes the trigger.

"We are going to fight them within an inch of their lives," she says with a smile. "What I fear most is not the bombing, but if there is an uprising against Saddam Hussein like there was after the Gulf war — then that will be a real bloodbath," says a 40-year-old

schoolteacher. In the immediate aftermath of the Gulf war, President Saddam's most dangerous moment came when 15 of the country's 18 governors rose in rebellion against him.

Having been told to "take things into your own hands" by the then United States president George Bush and then academics who watched the "crushing" in the city of Najaf insist the Iraqi people will not risk another rebellion. "When the uprising was put down, the people were completely traumatised," he says. "I know this gen-

eral. If there is an uprising, as there was before, that will be a real bloodbath"

the room, cocks her empty Kalashnikov, holds her breath and squeezes the trigger.

"People here say, we've tried that before. I remember the Republican Guard arriving in the south and their tanks were scrawled with the words: *al-shi'a ba'da al-yawn* — 'no more Shia after today'."

He adds: "No one knows how many were killed in Najaf but I'll never forget it."

These days the "mnrder-

ers, thieves and hooligans" who rebelled are nowhere to be seen in Baghdad. The soldiers and civilians guarding the most sensitive military installations are speaking with one voice, in the same defiant tone pumped out nightly on the television.

At the Dora electricity plant a 25-year-old soldier, Muhammad Majid, said: "I have been through 33 days of bombing in the Gulf war. I'll be here again on the same gate. We are the sons of Saddam Hussein and we will fight for him with our bare hands."

At the interior ministry, a likely target if war comes, Colonel Mohammed Rashid, aged 27, said: "We will be here and we will be waiting, to fight with all the blood in our veins. But God willing, it won't come."

In the house where the Kalashnikov is kept under the red cushion, Commando Tarris is offering sweet tea.

"There will be no uprising this time. All the thieves and hooligans have been dealt with," he said. "But really, we are waiting for [United Nations secretary-general] Kofi Annan — perhaps he can help us."

Robin Cook, page 12

## Visit for Vanunu after 11 years solitary

Sarah Boseley

THE former nuclear technician, Mordechai Vanunu, who has spent 11 years in solitary confinement for revealing Israel's possession of a nuclear bomb, has been allowed a visit from his newly adoptive parents in the United States.

Nick and Mary Eloff are the first people, apart from his brothers, to talk to him face to face since he was convicted of treason in 1986 and jailed after being abducted from Italy and brought back to Israel by Mossad agents. Vanunu told the couple he would not agree to any conditions linked with leaving solitary, despite evidence that the Israeli government would like to strike a deal with him. Mr Eloff said: "Our im-

pressions are that he is still in pretty good rig. We could touch him. We all cried."

The visit was supposed to last two hours, but was brought to an end after 20 minutes, when Vanunu began talking about the past. In 1986, concerned about the military's arsenal, he went to London to tell the Sunday Times that Israel had nuclear weapons. He was picked up by a Mossad agent named Cindy, who lured him to Italy, where he was moved from solitary — in return for conditions, which usually demand his silence about the kidnap and his colleagues at the Dimona nuclear plant in the Negev desert.

## Aid call for Sudanese hit by drought and war

AP in Nairobi and Addis Ababa

THE United Nations yesterday launched an appeal for \$109 million of humanitarian aid to Sudan, where drought is exacerbating problems caused by 14 years of civil war.

Four million Sudanese need food, wells for clean water and medical care, said Carl Tinstman, of Unicef and Operation Lifeline Sudan. "A deadly combination of intensified fighting and widespread drought is threatening to displace hundreds of thousands and put entire communities at risk."

Since 1983, southern rebels, mainly Christians but also followers of tribal religions, have fought for autonomy from the Arab dominated

Khartoum government. An estimated 1.5 million Sudanese have died in 14 years, and more than 3 million have fled home. Last year, UN agencies received only 40 per cent of the \$120.8 million they requested.

Dahawi, a government official, said relief flights, which had been stopped because of the fighting, would soon be allowed to resume.

The director-general of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation yesterday also focused on Africa's chronic food shortages, saying that needed to help malnourished people, who could number 300 million by 2010. Jacques Diouf said that only 12 million hectares of 40 million hectares of suitable land had been irrigated.

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Clinton's lawyers say his private life is off-limits

## White House seeks to gag testimony

Ed Vulliamy in Washington

**P**RESIDENT Bill Clinton's inner sanctum was yesterday shoring up its defences against a fresh onslaught of allegations in the Monica Lewinsky sex-and-privilege scandal, trying to plead legal privilege against the questioning of a White House aide.

A White House deputy counsel, Bruce Lindsey, faced a Grand Jury, the White House turned itself into a stockade, trying to set parameters around the investigation into the scandal by the special prosecutor, Kenneth Starr.

Lawyers acting for Mr Clinton met the prosecutor's team yesterday for a stand-off in which they sought to put Mr Lindsey's questioning about the president's private life off legal limits.

The White House argues that a situation is now emerging in which the president has no confidential relationship with even his closest confidants.

It was not immediately clear, however, whether Mr Clinton's lawyers were going to plead executive privilege — a high-stakes measure — or simply invoke for reasons of national security. It was invoked by President Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal — without success.

The White House is calling in private counsel to the consequences of pleading executive privilege rather than rely on the justice department, which is represented in this case by Mr Starr. His side must show it believes Mr Lindsey has information pertinent to the inquiry.

Mr Lindsey arrived at the courthouse yesterday morning, but his testimony was delayed by an hour and a half as the chief judge told lawyers to iron out their differences on the parameters of questioning.

to which Mr Lindsey had objected. There was a gag on the exact contents of Mr Lindsey's testimony but sources indicated it concerned alleged



Intern Monica Lewinsky: claims she was told to lie

frequent meetings between Mr Clinton and Ms Lewinsky. Sources said Mr Lindsey was interrogated on Wednesday about Mr Clinton's relationship with Paula Jones, who is suing the president for sexual harassment, and about his defence strategy.

He was also likely to be asked about further reported meetings between Ms Lewinsky and the close presidential aide implicated in the scandal, Vernon Jordan.

Mr Jordan was also due to testify yesterday, but a call from Mr Starr late on Wednesday night postponed his appearance. Mr Jordan's lawyer said it would be "a considerable period of time" before it was rescheduled.

Ms Lewinsky's tape-recorded account of the affair to a friend, Linda Tripp, claims Mr Jordan persuaded her to lie on oath in the Jones case, reportedly saying: "If you say it didn't happen, it didn't happen."

He is also the suspected author of a three-page memo guiding Ms Lewinsky on how to coach Ms Tripp to lie in evidence about another woman involved in the Jones case, Kathleen Willey.

Mr Starr wants to know about allegations that, after Ms Lewinsky testified in the Jones case that she had no affair with the president, Mr Jordan pulled strings to find her a new job. Sources claim Mr Jordan began to do so within 72 hours of reports that Ms Lewinsky was going to be subpoenaed in the Jones case. He found her a job at the Revlon cosmetics company.

Mr Starr's strategy is to box Ms Lewinsky in and do a deal whereby she changes her testimony, and then to proceed to similarly compromise Mr Jordan.

Mr Jordan, however, has been adviser to successive presidents since Lyndon Johnson.

According to one White House aide: "He is the one man who will save his own skin before that of the president."



Carlos Santana prepares a futuristic float for the Best Samba School competition in the annual carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, starting on Sunday

## WORLD NEWS 9

### Jewel thief on the run writes his own script

Ed Vulliamy in Washington

**H**E LOOKS like a film star, and almost became one. The "rock 'n' roll bandit" of Connecticut, curse of the rich along the Atlantic coast whose jewellery he stole while they were entertaining each other, sold a book proposal and possible film rights about his escapades to Paramount Pictures — using a pseudonym.

But the bandit, also known as the dinnertime burglar, was identified by police on Wednesday as Alan Golder, a smooth-talking jewel thief who clambered up drainpipes or clinging vines to get into houses, and now Paramount insists that the project is "no longer in development".

Golder, still at large, is said to be responsible for between 30 and 35 robberies in the Greenwich area which netted about \$500,000 worth of gold jewellery and gem stones.

Police believe he may be part of an organised ring. Golder turns out to be a paroled murderer, released last June after serving 15 years for killing a millionaire in his home during a botched burglary.

He sold his story, under the pseudonym of William Kneudelseder, to Paramount for \$11,000, suggesting the title, *Precious Metal: Confessions of a Rock 'n' Roll Bandit*.

Greenwich police began their investigations yesterday into an intriguing subject to the Paramount deal, hoping that it may help to lead them to Golder.

A police spokesman said William Kneudelseder is the name of a Los Angeles Times reporter who wrote a book about an investigation into connections between the MCA record company and the mafia.

Police believe that Golder may have liked a quote in the book from the MCA boss Irving Azoff: "It was rock 'n' roll rules — I win, you lose."

### Hispanics rally round treaty to get lands back

Mexican-Americans are forcing the US to confront the legacy of its first war to grab more territory, writes James Brooke

**I**N A ROADSIDE shop in the hamlet of Truchas in New Mexico which was filled with weavings and Spanish religious art, tourists browsed unattended recently as the owner and his friends excitedly talked in a back room about an obscure historical document.

"It's our Bible," Luis Sandoval, a retired teacher, said. He thumbed through a copy of the peace treaty signed 150 years ago between Mexico and the United States, and added: "One day, that treaty will allow us to get our land grants studied, to have justice served to our people."

Nationally in the United States, the anniversary on February 2 of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo passed almost unnoticed. Although the treaty allowed the creation of the south-west of the US, there were no commemorative stamps and few official speeches.

Facing the prospect of an attack on Iraq, few Americans looked back to the nation's first war of territorial expansion. The treaty increased US territory by a third, adding all or parts of Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Wyoming.

Official silence over the treaty anniversary stemmed partly from a reluctance to offend Mexico, now the US's third-largest trading partner.

Adding urgency to the

measure is a low-level guerrilla war against the US forest service that has developed in the surrounding dry, pine-covered hills. The service owns much of the disputed land. Shots have been fired at its workers, an office and a radio tower have been bombed, and a government truck and barn have been burned.

**T**HERE has also been peaceful mobilisation. Music, dance, poetry, the unveiling of a mural and seminars marking the treaty anniversary are planned in coming months. The campaign will be capped with a public display of pages from the original treaty in Santa Fe, 40 miles south of Truchas.

In Albuquerque, the speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, recently posed with hearing Hispanic leaders before poster-size replicas of treaty pages.

Treaty mania revolves around land, votes and identity. Hispanic residents hope to use the document to wrest from the forest service vast areas of land they say were granted to their ancestors, largely by Spain, in the 18th century.

Republicans hope to use the land-grant issue to break a half-century of Democratic political control of northern New Mexico. Already the bill, the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty Land Claims Act of 1997, is creating strange political bedfellows. At the Gingrich news conference, Roberto Mondragon, a long-time Democrat and member of New Mexico's Green Party, gave hearty *abrazos* to the Speaker and to the bill's sponsor, Bill Redmond, the Truchas district's new Republican congressman.

"There is an old Spanish proverb: 'If you love me, show me you love me — don't just tell me,'" Mr Mondragon said.

Hispanic residents here argue that the treaty, with its clauses stipulating respect for Spanish and Mexican land grants, is a powerful legal lever for winning back lands usurped after the Civil War by the Santa Fe Ring, a corrupt alliance of American lawyers, judges and territorial governors who manipulated a court system alien to Spanish-speaking farmers.

Much of this land, after heavy use by timber and cattle companies, ended up in the hands of the forest service in the 1920s and 1930s. — *New York Times*.

## 4 ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS including Best Supporting Actor - Anthony Hopkins

"...ELECTRIFYING AND COMPELLING... AMISTAD PROVES ITSELF NOT TO BE THE SLAVE SEQUEL TO SCHINDLER'S LIST, BUT SOMETHING ALTOGETHER MORE SURPRISING." ★★★★★ UNMISSABLE

Christopher Hemphill, EMPIRE MAGAZINE

## AMISTAD

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ANTHONY HOPKINS  
DJIMON HOUNSOU  
MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY

DREAMWORKS PICTURES PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH HBO PICTURES "AMISTAD"  
NIGEL HAWTHORNE DAVID PAYMER PETE POSTLETHWAITE STELLAN SKARSGARD  
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## 10 WORLD NEWS

## Hostages seized in Georgia

Kidnappers implicated in Shevardnadze assassination attempt threaten to kill four UN personnel

Tom Whitehouse  
in Moscow

**S**ECURITY forces throughout the former Soviet republic of Georgia were on full alert yesterday after four United Nations military observers were taken hostage by armed men implicated in last week's assassination attempt on President Eduard Shevardnadze.

Last night Russian television showed the heavily armed hostage-takers holed up in a house in western Georgia, threatening to kill

the UN personnel unless seven suspects arrested for the attempt on Mr Shevardnadze's life were freed. They also called for the release of "political prisoners".

The two Uruguays, a Swede and a Czech held hostage are part of a UN observer mission to the breakaway north-west region of Abkhazia. After two men accused of involvement in the attempted assassination were arrested by Georgian police in the town of Zugdidi early yesterday, the UN mission there was shelled and the observers abducted.

Georgian special forces

with tanks have the hostage-takers and their captives surrounded in a house belonging to a local government official about 10 miles from Zugdidi. The official and his family are also being held. Negotiators led by the interior minister, Kakha Tarmagadze, were talking to the hostage-takers by mobile phone yesterday.

The UN personnel are part of a 100-strong team monitoring a truce between government forces and Abkhaz separatists who declared their region's independence from Georgia in 1993.

But the hostage-takers are not thought to be directly con-

nected to Abkhazia. According to Mr Tarmagadze, they are probably die-hard supporters of Mr Shevardnadze's predecessor as president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

Gamsakhurdia died, probably by suicide, in 1993 after being ousted in a coup the previous year. Zugdidi is a stronghold of the Zviadists, whom Mr Shevardnadze blames for last week's attempt on his life and an earlier one in 1995. He accuses groups in Russia of helping them.

The Georgian foreign ministry issued a thinly veiled attack on Russia as the ulti-

mate sponsor of the hostage-taking and recent violence. There are serious forces behind these terrorists that are interested in provoking havoc in Georgia and undermining positive developments in the region," the statement said.

Russian forces controlling part of the buffer zone with Abkhazia were also accused of turning a blind eye to the movement of terrorists between the separatist region and Georgia proper.

Mr Shevardnadze has accused some forces in Russia of trying to destabilise his country after the civil war of 1992 to 1993.

struction of a pipeline from the new Caspian oil fields to Georgia's Black Sea ports. Russia presently carries most of the region's oil pipelines and would lose out if Western oil companies chose the shorter route across Georgia.

Mr Shevardnadze was Soviet foreign minister under Mikhail Gorbachev. He returned to his native Georgia in 1992, was elected president a year later and, though he failed to prevent the secession of Abkhazia, he began a successful economic reconstruction programme of the country after the civil war of 1992 to 1993.



A couple relax yesterday by the Old Fort in New Delhi, where voters went to the polls on Monday. India's election is due to continue into early March. PHOTOGRAPH: JEROME DELAY

## Hindu nationalists feel power slipping away



The wit and subtlety of BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee (left) may not be enough to win him India's election, writes Suzanne Goldenberg

**T**HE candidate ambled across the stage under the full moon. With what was left of his voice after a day of campaigning, he struggled to draw a response from the prime assembly.

"I know there is a lot of infatuation in this country," he told his audience. "But now we have started killing new-born governments."

There was a collective gasp. Then the crowd broke into nervous laughter.

Indian politicians do not usually tell jokes about the killing of baby girls. But Atal Bihari Vajpayee, prime ministerial candidate of the Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is different.

Aged 71, he regularly tope opinion polls and his party is poised to win the most seats in a general election which started on Monday and continues into March.

But what once seemed likely to be a BJP walkover

has turned into a toughly fought contest. In the process, Mr Vajpayee's famed rapier-like wit has given way in crude personal attacks. His main target has been the Congress party's leading campaigner, Sonia Gandhi.

Last week Mrs Gandhi called Mr Vajpayee a liar. Mr Vajpayee spat back: "Malicious allegations and little knowledge do not contribute to electoral success."

The BJP's disquiet stems from the prospect that it may be out-maneuvred, as it was after the election in 1996, when it tried to form a coalition government after what is expected to be an inconclusive election result.

This would be a bitter outcome for the BJP, as it tries to cast off its image as a party of intemperant, upper-caste Hindus, hostile to the outside world and intent on developing nuclear weapons.

Mr Vajpayee is largely responsible for the apparent transformation. In a teetotal, puritanical party he is single, drinks and has had a long relationship with a married woman. He is also trusted by many Muslims who otherwise fear the BJP.

Until Mrs Gandhi provoked him, he had campaigned on benign topics such as stability, leaving rabble-rousing others.

Now, however, Mr Vajpayee is a candidate, a Muslim businessman, Syed Mohammed Mateen, turns the pages of a photo album featuring snapshots of the BJP politician in his sitting room during Ramadan.

"We all like Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee," he says. "But we don't know who the policy makers of the BJP are. Maybe, if they get a complete majority, the party will not give the prime ministership to him."

These suspicions are widespread. Many Indians fear the BJP is a puppet tied to the shadowy Hindu militant group, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Mr Vajpayee, like most BJP leaders, is a member of the RSS.

At the RSS office in Delhi, the joint secretary, Madan Das, says: "The BJP is a creation of the RSS cadre. Mr Vajpayee cannot be a moderate. He was born, brought up and grown in the RSS. He just presents our thoughts differently."

Some in the BJP fear that by broadening the party's base beyond well-off, upper-caste urban Hindus the party risks alienating those who believed its claim to be a principled party.

Party leaders admit compromises have been made. And some members argue the BJP has sullied itself by admitting defections from other parties, including some with criminal records. Corruption has done much to blight its record in state governments.

"They say one thing but they do another," said Shankar Bhargava, who resigned as a BJP member of the Rajasthan state legislature last month. "If BJP politicians are running after plots of land, how can we give them the whole country to run?"

## News in brief

## Former POW tells court of ordeal

A BRITISH former prisoner of war gave a harrowing account at the Tokyo district court yesterday of the brutal beatings, malnutrition and disease he suffered in a Japanese camp during the second world war.

Arthur Titherington, chairman of the Japanese Labour Camp Survivors' Association, was one of three plaintiffs giving evidence in a compensation suit against the Japanese government. They are demanding an official apology and £13,500 for each of the 20,000 former internees they represent.

Mr Titherington said: "I think it is almost impossible to expect anyone in this courtroom to understand the mental state of any man who has lived for three and a half years with fear, starvation and unnecessary illness. All I want is justice." A judgment is expected in June. — Jonathan Watts, Tokyo.

## Le Pen denies assault

THE leader of France's far-right National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, yesterday denied in court that he assaulted a Socialist candidate during last year's general election campaign.

Mr Le Pen, aged 68, who faces up to three years in prison and a £30,000 fine if found guilty of causing "violence and public injury", told the court in Versailles that he was in Mantes-la-Jolie, west of Paris, on May 30, 1997, to support his daughter who was running against the Socialist candidate, Annette Pleuvast-Bergeal.

He said Ms Pleuvast-Bergeal, who subsequently won the seat, insulted him. She and several eyewitnesses claim Mr Le Pen tried forcibly to remove a tricolour scarf from around her neck. Television footage showed him shoving the Socialist candidate in the chest. — Jon Henley, Paris.

## Shamed director resigns

THE United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has forced its director to resign, ending an acrimonious tenure that was highlighted by an embarrassing invitation last month to the Palestinian Authority president, Yasser Arafat.

Several sources said the invitation, which was extended, revoked, then extended again and finally spurned by Mr Arafat, was such a public relations catastrophe that the museum needed a scapegoat and landed on the director, Walter Reich. Some also suggested internal tensions had been brewing for some time between Dr Reich and the chairman of the museum's council, Miles Lerman. — New York Times, Washington.

## Aid for earthquake victims

TWO Russian helicopters flew out from Tajikistan yesterday with more than 10 tonnes of humanitarian aid, including powdered milk and medicine for victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

About 30,000 people were left homeless by the earthquake on February 4, which killed more than 4,000, but efforts to get supplies to them have been severely hampered by bad weather. The International Committee of the Red Cross hoped to begin daily airdrops of emergency supplies, including food and tents, in the zone yesterday. — Reuters, Dushanbe.

## Rioters burn Chinese shops

DOZENS of Chinese-owned shops were damaged or burned yesterday as thousands of people protested angrily at rising food prices in the provincial Indonesian town of Kendari, on Sulawesi island.

About 300 police with sticks and shields were deployed to disperse the rioters, estimated by witnesses to number up to 10,000.

Meanwhile in Jakarta, about 600 students at the country's largest university called on President Suharto's government to resign over the worst economic crisis in 30 years. — AP, Jakarta.

## Soft landing for Mir crew

TWO Russians, a Frenchman and his six salamanders landed softly in the snows of the Kazakh steppe yesterday, exchanging the stuffy confines of the Mir space station for bitter cold on earth. Rescue workers covered the Russian commander Anatoly Solovov, engineer Pavel Vinogradov and French air force pilot Leopold Eybarts with thick jackets after pulling them from their capsule into -30C cold.

The Russians had spent much of their six-month mission repairing the 12-year space station, which was damaged badly by a collision in June. Mr Eybarts, aged 40 and on his first space mission, brought back to earth six salamanders which had been used in experiments to test the effects of weightlessness on their egg-laying abilities. — Reuters, Kosnau.

## Early poll called in Denmark



Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the Danish prime minister, is encircled by press cameras in Copenhagen yesterday as he called an early general election for March 11, six months ahead of the minority government's deadline. The poll will leapfrog the May 28 referendum on reforms to the workings of the European Union. "We need a stable atmosphere ahead of the referendum," Mr Rasmussen said. PHOTOGRAPH: KELD NAVNTOF

## 'Men power' loses steam

PROMISE KEEPERS, the male-only Christian revivalist movement that urges men to take charge of their families, has sacked its entire staff of 546, claiming a financial crisis.

The decision comes four months after Promise Keepers brought hundreds of thousands of men to Washington for one of the largest religious gatherings held in the United States.

The organisation, which encourages men to accept Jesus and become better fathers and husbands by taking spiritual leadership of their families, had charged \$60 (£36) admission to its stadium rallies. Such fees accounted for 72 per cent of the group's income, but last year it decided to stop charging admission and rely on donations alone.

Promise Keepers' founder, Bill McCartney, said the group would not be staffed by volunteers.

In a statement, he said the Washington rally had been a drain on resources and the group had been forced to use the contributions it had gathered at Christmas to cover costs.

He said the group was still planning 19 stadium events this year and called on Church leaders to donate funds that would allow the organisation to continue. — Reuters, Washington.

## Camorra mafia's clan war sours Naples comeback

John Hooper in Rome

ITALIAN security chiefs met in Naples yesterday to agree a new strategy to combat the Camorra mafia, after an upsurge in gang warfare killed 10 people in as many days.

The latest victim was Giovanni Gargiulo, aged 14, whose murder on Wednesday moved Archbishop Cardinal Michele Giordano to describe the Camorra as "one of the faces of the Devil".

He was the youngest victim to be targeted by Camorra gangs and is thought to have been shot dead to silence his brother, a convicted gang member.

Since the city elected the

ex-Communist mayor Antonio Bassolino in 1993, Naples has had a modest revival. But the city's very plans for its future appear to be dragging it back to an unhappy past.

Almost £3 billion will be spent on reconstruction, and the Camorra gangs want to secure their share. The new "war" is between the clan led by jailed godfather Eduardo Contino, and a gang in the east, where most of the work will be carried out.

The gang leader, Francesco Mazzarella, was shot dead this week outside Poggioreale prison as he waited for his son's release. Last year Rome sent in soldiers to guard official buildings, including the prison.

## ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATION

JOAN CUSACK - Best Supporting Actress

"...RIB-ACHINGLY FUNNY  
...I HAVEN'T LAUGHED  
SO MUCH SINCE  
THE FULL MONTY."

Nick Fisher - THE SUN

"...A SHAMELESSLY  
FUNNY COMEDY."

Matthew Sweet - INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

"KEVIN KLINE DELIVERS A  
TOUR DE FORCE  
OF COMIC ACTING...  
CUSACK RESPONDS WITH  
SOME OF THE MOST  
TRUTHFUL AND FUNNIEST  
COMIC ACTING OF THE PAST YEAR."

Christopher Toole - DAILY MAIL

Kevin Kline  
In & Out



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JP 11/15/97



# Analysis NHS waiting lists



Cook's answer to Maggie O'Kane  
12

The Government is 'embarrassed' that rising NHS queues are imperilling one of its main pre-election pledges. But don't judge too hastily, say **David Brindle** and **Michael White**: in politics, spending tends to happen rather closer to voting day

## The patient English

**W**HEN Dennis Skinner and Paddy Ashdown both berated Tony Blair mid-week over the contrast between rising NHS waiting lists and the Treasury's bulging coffers, the Prime Minister at least knew it must have been coming. Far from falling by 100,000, as promised in one of Labour's five pre-election pledges, "in the nine months since the election NHS waiting lists have gone up by 1,000 a week," Mr Ashdown told the Commons.

His embarrassment came not least from the ammunition the figures would give the Labour left and the Lib Dems who have been hammering away since last summer at Gordon Brown's other pre-election pledge to stick to Tory spending totals. The Government is determined not to spend the sums that could reduce the health-service lists at a stroke. Brown will not budge and Blair will back him. Treasury ministers believe that to throw money at causes like the NHS will only repeat Nigel Lawson's mistake in 1987-89: boom and bust. They also want to hold back

their largesse and win the next election. That does not mean that ministers will not redistribute cash within the overall spending totals. Already a much-trumpeted £1 billion-plus has been re-directed for health and education. In addition, useful smaller sums have been deployed for cancer operations, for urban initiatives and GPs, much of it allegedly saved from "cutting NHS bureaucracy".

That was part of the manifesto package, singled out to be one of the "five key pledges" dreamed up to reflect what polling showed most voters cared about: jobs, low inflation, crime, education — and waiting lists. Mr Ashdown cheekily waved the card at Mr Blair on Wednesday.

In power, Labour's health team has set about raising NHS morale — but not NHS pay — and implemented a series of supply-side improvements to get the system as a whole working as well as the best NHS trusts do. Information, for instance, is notoriously hard to exchange between NHS computers. Mergers are back in vogue.

But they have also deliberately kept the spending pressure on hard. Like Brown and Blair, health ministers know that past Labour governments have spent, then repented — and lost the next election. So perhaps it is not surprising that, at this stage of the political cycle, the Government is avoiding spending to secure shorter waiting lists.

Frank Dobson has always likened waiting lists to an oil tanker which would take a long time to stop and turn around. But if he has offered no magic funding to slow it down more quickly, he has taken other initiatives to deflect criticism. In November, when the last quarterly figures came out, he set up a waiting-list action team in the West Midlands. It was headed by Stephen Day, a health manager with "real expertise in tackling waiting times locally".

One of the most awkward aspects of yesterday's figures, from the Government's point of view, is that the West Midlands shows the second-worst performance of the eight English health regions in terms of numbers joining the queue. Its total list is up 5.9 per cent in three months, a result better only than that of the South and West.



Of 95 hospital trusts in the West Midlands, seven had no patients waiting more than 12 months at the end of last November and another four each had fewer than 10. Yet six each had more than 100 and one accounted for almost a quarter of all those in the region waiting more than a year.

The lesson, says Day, is clear. "This disparity suggests that managerial lessons and changes in clinical culture have taken root in some hospitals but not in others — and that demands for extra funding need to be set against an imperative to raise the performance of the worst towards that of the best." There is, moreover, no apparent correlation between length of wait and the size and complexity of the hospital: University Hospitals, in Birmingham, which

includes the region's main teaching hospital, had only 42 patients waiting more than nine months at the end of November, including just nine waiting more than a year. "That said, waiting times clearly suffer when hospitals or health authorities get into financial problems," says Day. "Of the six trusts with more than a hundred 12-month waiters, five have been managing deficits this year."

Still, so far Labour's health team remains popular and even admired within the party. Tessa Jowell and Alan Milburn are high-flying Blairites; Margaret Jay is her father's (Jim Callaghan) daughter; Paul Boateng is a street-smart lawyer. And though he refuses to shave that Old Labour beard, Frank Dobson is judged a success of the new Cabinet. A bruiser of the old Camden Council school, Dobson has made mistakes — but they have been few compared with some favoured Blairites.

Whatever quarrels the professions are having with him, the NHS rank and file feels that his heart is on their side, and that he will get what he can out of Gordon Brown but not by feuding in public.

STEPHEN Day is not the first waiting-list "supremo" to have been brought in by the Department of Health, nor is he likely to be the last. He has 25 million to spend on pilot schemes of new ways to cut waits; this compares with the £30 million he invested to achieve results in the West Midlands. And he is co-ordinating task forces in each of the regions.

Schemes approved so far include moving treatment "closer to home", which is a fashionable euphemism for performing minor operations in clinics and GPs' surgeries; ensuring that referral and treatment decisions "reflect clinical priorities", which means rationing care; and taking a "whole system" approach to treating patients

to private hospitals for procedures paid for by the NHS; and surgeons were paid huge seasonal fees — reputedly up to £1,000 — for turning up on a Saturday. It would not look good if a Labour government were to go down the same road.

MPs feel the same. "Frank does his business in this place," one old lag said last night. "I imagine things might have been different if we'd had Harriet."

Whatever quarrels the professions are having with him, the NHS rank and file feels that his heart is on their side, and that he will get what he can out of Gordon Brown but not by feuding in public.

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# Comment

## Diary

Matthew Norman

**A** POWERFUL contender for Most Amusing Press Officer of 1998 steps into the spotlight. Marc Cranfield-Adams of the House Builders' Federation sends a four-page fax concerning an Archers storyline about the development of 12 "executive style houses" at Ambridge Hall, home of Linda Snell. "To make the storyline credible," he writes, "the local plan allocation would have been known to the villagers for some time, since the Parish council would have been consulted at all stages of the local plan production." Among many, many other points — you wouldn't believe how many — he argues that a development so close to the River Am would be at danger from flooding. "This," he insists, "is typical of the type of misinformation we are trying to combat in the media." How true. However, from page 4, a fax from the programme's senior producer promises only "small amendments" to one script. Is Marc not losing this most important battle? "No, it's a victory," he says. "They have to take us seriously. If they don't, representation to the BBC at a senior level cannot be ruled out."

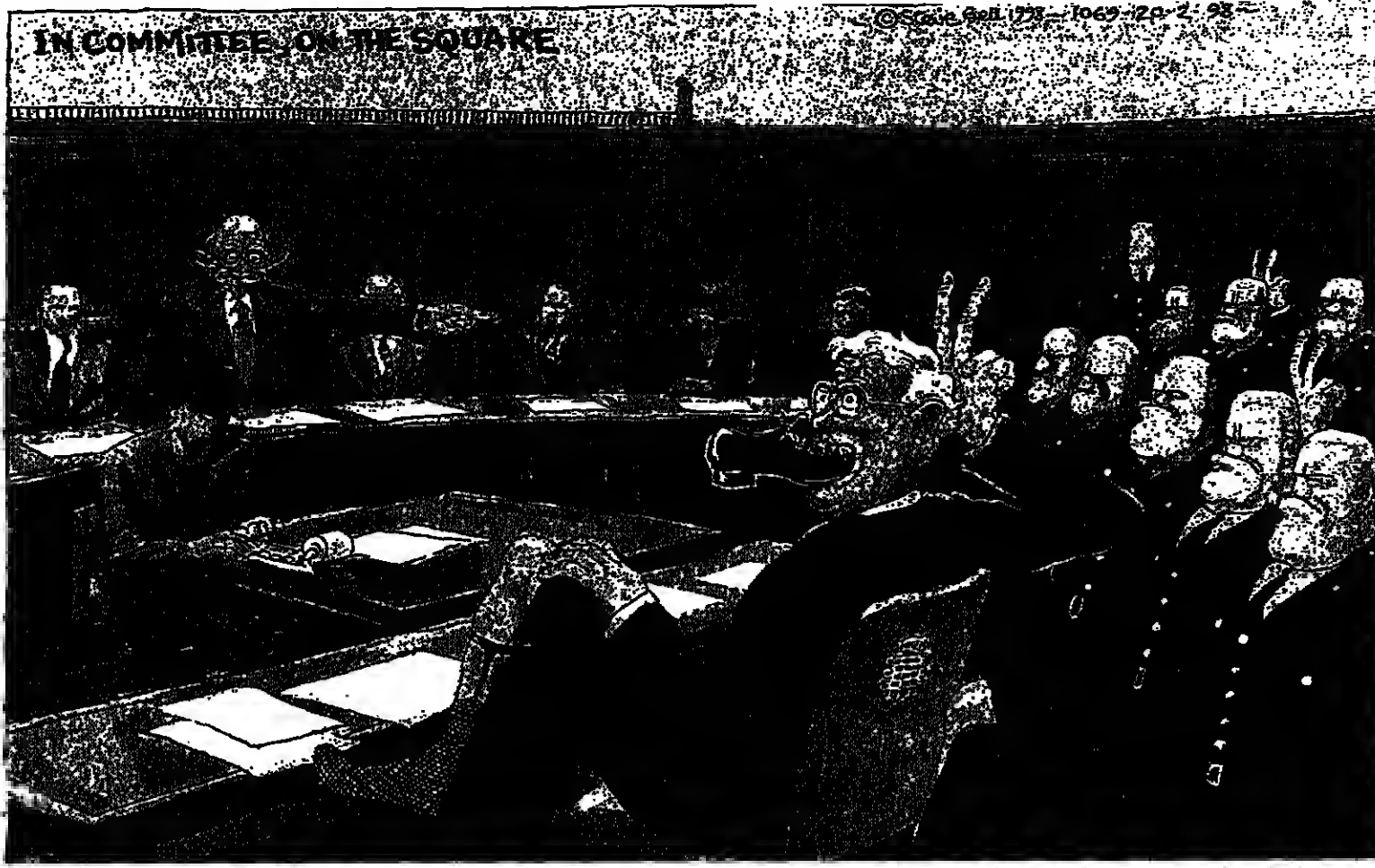
**O**N Wednesday afternoon, when the Agriculture Select Committee met to discuss the drafting of its forthcoming report on food safety, its chairman Peter Luff was unable to attend. Mr Luff was at home in bed with a touch of food poisoning, caught, it appears, in one of the House of Commons restaurants.

**T**HE campaign to clear the name of my friend Michael Winner, who has been banned from a Mayfair restaurant for alleged rudeness to staff, continues to struggle. Yesterday's request for a character reference was put to the restaurateur Anthony Worrell Thompson. "Well, actually," said Anthony, "he's banned from my restaurants too." Oh dear. "Yes, he has been for some years. Of course he may be a perfect nice guy, I don't know him very well. I only deal with him through my solicitors." Dear oh dear. Still, there is some good news. Michael will be returning to the Worrell Thompson empire after all. "Yes, and I painted images of him will shortly be appearing," says Anthony. "On too seats in my restaurants." What an enchanting thought.

**I** AM sad to learn of another blow to my friend Hilma Howard. Hilma, you will recall, is continually concerned about her son Michael, who, even in Opposition, continues to be a martyr to his colds. Now his grandson Nick, Michael's boy, is involved in a row over Judaism. Nick, always raised as Jew, has become an evangelical Christian, and following attempts to convert other Jewish undergraduates at Oxford has been accused of "spiritual Nazism" by Schumley Boteach, a publicity hungry Rabbi. All the young gentleman has said, so far is this: "I wonder what my grandmother is going to say. She will probably be very hurt." Yes, Nick, she will. As for what this will do to your father's sinuses, I dread to think.

**I**N its relentless drive to uphold its image as a national joke, Group 4 has had a triumph. The security company has escorted a remand prisoner from a prison in Durham not to nearby Chester-Le-Street, as hoped, but almost 100 miles away to Chester. Still, it could have been worse: as a bemused Durham copper remarks, the man might easily have been on trial in Washington, Tyne and Wear.

**B**UT ME ON A WINTER DAY IN BRISTOL, IN THE MID-1990S.



## Mo Mowlam has done well. Now she must take another big risk

Decca Aitkenhead



**S**ECRETARIES of State for Northern Ireland have had a regrettable history of regarding themselves as headmasters of a school for confirmed delinquents. The little monsters will never come good, they shrug, and the best they can do is police the playground until it's somebody else's turn to take over. Tory ministers with a disciplinary streak probably rather enjoyed themselves. Mo Mowlam regards her job in a more ambitious light, and has done a remarkable one; that she should find herself forced back into the role of exasperated headteacher this week is a great shame. If she expels Sinn Féin, it will be with the heaviest reluctance and the highest of motives — and a risk of permanent regret.

The case for expulsion looks at first unarguable. Gerry Adams signed up to the Mitchell Principles — then last week two men were shot dead, and the police said the IRA were responsible. There's no point having rules if you let people break them: the integrity of the talks must be protected, and precedent has already been set with the expulsion of the UDF. What would the unionists say if Sinn Féin were allowed to get away with it? On paper, there is no debate: Adams has to go. But Northern Ireland is not a paper exercise, and the Province is not a school. When you expel Adams, he does not become someone else's problem.

As always in Northern Ireland, there are two layers of conversation going on. Sinn

Fein's official objection to expulsion is pretty thin. "The party does not have a case to answer," Adams insisted, claiming he neither speaks for the IRA, nor is implicated in its actions, but owes his place at the table to an electoral mandate. Everyone knows this is nonsense. If he has no relationship with the IRA, what is he doing there? We credit Adams with the IRA cease fire; if his voice counts for nothing with republican terrorists, what's the point in negotiating a settlement with him?

But the official relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA has always been necessarily muddy, partly for political reasons, and partly because it is. We all know this. We also know that when he says he oughtn't to be excluded for the killings, what he means is that Sinn Féin did not sanction them, and are doing everything possible to prevent them.

**A**ND we know that when Adams warns of violence, this is not rhetorical menace: if Sinn Féin are out of the talks, their influence over those getting bored with the ceasefire is crippled. There is a theory doing the rounds that this is all a ruse by Adams to get out of talks which aren't going his way, while retaining the moral high ground. Anyone still stuck in that old Adams-as-bloodthirsty loop is scarcely worth the time it takes to point out the extraordinary lengths Gerry Adams has gone to to sustain the talks,

and is as intellectually hostile to the possibility of peace as the bomber. There is obviously a republican element determined to derail the peace process, otherwise two men would not be dead. But by expelling Sinn Féin, the Government rewards the gunmen with the very prize they had in their sights when they took aim. When observers sigh that republicans are sinking back to "what they do best," they seem not to have noticed that the expulsion gives those

### Expulsion gives gunmen licence

gunmen their first real licence to do precisely that.

If Adams is expelled, his warnings prove true, and the IRA ceasefire shatters into fireworks, what then? Re-admission to the talks will be barred, and that famous peace train will then be pushing on without him — but without Sinn Féin on board, it is less a peace train than a pantomime horse. Putting the case for expulsion. Mo Mowlam argued that "you cannot negotiate with a gun to your head", and it's a reasonable point. But in Northern Ireland's politics there is always a gun to your head — and it's a more volatile gun if Adams is out of the talks. That's the trouble with Northern Ireland. The normal rules of democracy don't al-

ways work. If Mo Mowlam wants to find grounds for keeping Sinn Féin in the talks, the openings can be found. For example, the precedent set by the UDF is not conclusive — the UDF had admitted to a campaign of violence, while the IRA insists its ceasefire is holding. To rely on terrorists' sense of fair play and decency ("So you say you didn't do it? Jolly good") — would clearly be rash, but this is the blurred world of realpolitik, and the IRA's denial offers room for manoeuvre. (The reiteration of the ceasefire is certainly worth something. A terrorist outfit intent on victory through violence usually likes to let you know when it has killed someone.) In addition, the IRA link to the murders is only an allegation: the entire talks process can't stop while we wait for a trial, but again, the grey area is there to be exploited.

**T**HIS sounds rather like an appeal to bend the rules, and it is. We'd still be locked in the line that we never talk to terrorists if we didn't bend the rules; we talk to terrorists because otherwise they kill people. You don't have to buy Sinn Féin's sophistry to see that peace depends upon finding a way to include them, and that a settlement matters more than a protocol. When Mo Mowlam visited the Maze, some were scandalised by "irregular" behaviour, but it worked. Northern Ireland is an irregular place, and Mo Mowlam must take another risk.

Robin Cook replies to Guardian reports of child deaths in Iraq

## Saddam is to blame

**K**OFT ANNAN arrives in Baghdad today. He carries with him all our hopes for peace. None of us wants to use force. We would gladly stand our military down if we could find a peaceful and workable agreement with Saddam Hussein. We are keeping the door to peace open as wide as possible for as long as we can.

Maggie O'Kane told the story in yesterday's Guardian of Kena Azar, a six-month-old Iraqi boy suffering from a plague borne on a sand-fly. She used his sad story to argue that the sanctions regime on Iraq should be torn down. But the sanctions regime does not prevent medicines or food from getting to the Iraqi people. Imports of food and medicine have never been banned. In fact, the reverse is true. Ever since sanctions were last imposed, Britain has led efforts to make sure that the impact on the Iraqi people was minimised, and that the impact on the regime was maximised. In 1991 we tabled a UN Resolution allowing Iraq to sell oil in return for humanitarian supplies. It was Saddam who refused to implement it. We tried again later that year

with another resolution. Again, the UN adopted it and Saddam ignored it. In 1995 we tried again, passing oil-for-food Resolution 986. This allows Iraq to sell \$2 billion of oil every six months, and spend the proceeds not just on food and medicines, but also on water and sanitation equipment, and on tasks like mine clearance in agricultural areas. These are the things that could make a real difference to the lives of children like

### Weapons matter more than his people

Kena. They have not done so, because Saddam has consistently blocked the UN's attempts to help his people. The Iraqi government rejected Resolution 986 for over a year. For months afterwards they prevented its implementation. And when they did sell oil, and got the proceeds to help the Iraqi people, Saddam used the money to lower by

an equivalent amount his government's own welfare spending. Each family's ration of baby milk was actually reduced — and so canned baby milk is now piled up in Iraq's markets.

The inescapable conclusion is that Saddam has no regard for the plight of his own people. He has consistently rejected all the UN's attempts to help, and instead prefers to use their suffering as another tool in his propaganda strategy. He spends vast sums on his weapons programmes, diverting huge amounts into vast complexes like the Al Hakam plant, 18 square kilometres in size, which was found to be producing anthrax rather than the animal feed he had claimed. He has spent at least \$1 billion on dozens of presidential palaces. He and his family live a life of luxury, in stark contrast to the avoidable misery of his own people.

At the end of the Gulf War Saddam pledged to destroy his chemical and biological weapons, and to let UN inspectors verify this. For the past seven years he has systematically deceived and obstructed those inspectors, while continuing his efforts to

rebuild an arsenal of weapons that could wipe out cities. Four out of five of their inspections have been blocked or delayed. Large quantities of the ingredients for chemical and biological weapons are still unaccounted for. If Saddam had fulfilled his pledges, then sanctions would have been lifted long ago. But his weapons programme matters far more to him than his people.

Saddam Hussein's writ does not run to Northern Iraq, and

### Baby milk is piled high in the streets

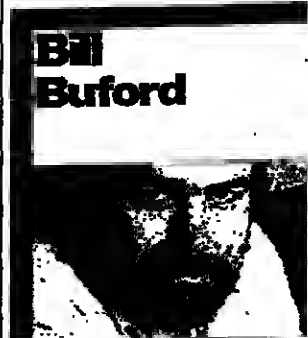
it is no accident that the people there are hugely better off. Not only do they have access to the food and medicines denied to the rest of the Iraqi people, but the international community has been able to work actively to help them. British aid is able to work for the people directly, through British NGOs like Save the Children and the

Mines Advisory Group. It is making a massive difference to their lives, from providing hospital equipment to rebuilding the villages Saddam tried to destroy. It is giving back to the people of Northern Iraq the chance to be healthy and self-sufficient. The contrast with the rest of the country could not be starker.

A resolution drafted by Britain goes before the Security Council today, more than doubling the size of the oil-for-food programme from \$2 to over \$5 billion. It contains safeguards to make sure the extra money actually helps the Iraqi people need so badly. It could restore clean water and proper sanitation to hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, restore electricity to their homes and help their farmers increase their output. If Saddam accepts the resolution, sad stories like that of Kena Azar can become part of Iraq's tragic history. If he does not, then the Iraqi people will know exactly who to blame.

Robin Cook is the Foreign Secretary

## She missed this war



**"M**Y DEAR William. Note: that's William. Not Bill. You must change your name. No one will ever take you seriously as Bill. And your hair. You've got to do something with your hair. Also that beard — shave it. You look like Allen Ginsberg."

I'm quoting Martha Gellhorn, the novelist and war reporter who died last Monday, and whose work I had the privilege of publishing for much of her last decade, her ninth. The elementary facts. Born nearly 90 years ago. Bossy, straight-talking, cigarette-smoking. The boozey reporter of wars and of the plight of the down and out. And a writer of novels and short stories. She was married to Ernest Hemingway, and hated that, whenever her work was written about, his name was mentioned as well. Just as I'm mentioning it now. But it's hard to avoid: they fell in love at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and divorced once the second world war had ended, and in between there were Cuba and big-game hunting and trips to China and battlefields in Finland and Barcelona and the beaches of Normandy.

Could there be any two people more romantic? He was Papa Hemingway, by then and she was what? Blonde and thin and sexy, a starlet of the highest order, a young Lauren Bacall, except that she was prettier and sexier and whole lot brainer than a young Lauren Bacall. There was a glamour about Martha Gellhorn, the glamour of black and white movies. It was in her manner and her way with the ways of the world. She was a dame.

**S**EVENTEEN years ago, I hadn't read Martha Gellhorn, but I was putting together a magazine of travel writing and someone said I should ask her to contribute. A piece about a journey to Haiti was the result — dramatic and eventful (a white woman on an island of angry blacks who nearly got stoned) and full of what I would come to recognize as Gellhorn rage — the irrepressible, passionate rage against injustice. "The Big Picture always exists," she wrote, and, by Big Picture she meant the self-interested dramas of power brokers and politicians and corporations. "And I seem to have spent my life observing how desperately the Big Picture affects the little people who did not devise it and have no control over it." Why had I come upon her now? I learned later that Penguin had brought out her first book in years, "Travels with myself and another" (that reluctant "another" was the famous husband), but Gellhorn was unhappy about how the book was published and unhappy with the publisher. (I would learn later still that she was to be unhappy with the many publishers who took on her work, including myself, but not one of us regretted the privilege.)

At the time, I was just thrilled by what felt like a discovery — this American in Britain, this throwback to a time when right was right and

wrong was an identifiable thing which must be fought at all costs. I wanted to do everything for her. I wanted to publish her in my magazine. I wanted to publish her books. I wanted to be her agent. I wanted to see her work translated, brought back into print, made into movies. And, for a brief period (both of us fools) she let me be all these things: editor, publisher, agent, the works. I should have known better.

Her letters are postmarked Belize and Kenya and Tanzania and the south of Spain — she was happiest in places where she could wear little — but her home was a cottage in Wales, where she read, drank "boozie" (another Gellhorn word), read mystery novels, and wrote, until she got tired of her company and came to London. And there she devoured company. John Pilger, Paul Theroux, James Fox, Nicholas Shakespeare, John Haff, Jeremy Harding. We'd see each other — one of us on the way out, as another arrived.

She had women friends, but Martha liked men and was flirty and coquettish even at the age of 85. Her account of the Normandy invasion was instructive: she was thrown off the press boat (Hemingway got her credentials), and, after being summarily returned to Britain, she flirted her way back on to another boat (a hospital ship), and, stowed away in a toilet, saw the invasion first hand.

**I**BROUGHT up Hemingway the first time I met her for dinner. It was the forbidden subject. "William," she said, "I have only one response to people when they bring up that name. And that's to show them the door." She didn't. In fact, she went on to talk about him at length — both that evening and on many occasions thereafter. Sometimes it was Ernest the monster (how he terrified his children) and sometimes Ernest the myth (he was, in her words, "shy in bed"), and had, she was convinced, slept with no more than five women). She became fed up with him during the second world war — he was bloated and self-centred and indifferent to history — but all ways had enormous respect for the writing. She talked about the philosophy of his sentences, and the business of parsing them back until they were as direct and true as they could possibly be — something she did in her own tough, often staccato prose. She said many things, but usually uttered under the influence of her liquor cabinet, and few details remain. Once I wrote

### 'Hemingway only had five women'

something on a napkin — Martha had gone to the loo, having just revealed some wonderfully salacious titbit — but I was so drunk that I later blew my nose into it and threw the napkin away.

There was a suspicion among Martha's friends that she would never die. She had too much energy, too much determination to be curtailed by something as ordinary as mortality. She had a 90th birthday coming up. Surely she'd make that. And there was the prospect of a war in Iraq, pure Gellhorn. She wouldn't miss that. But she will.

"There's no need to sweat so much now," Martha wrote me once. "I've always thought it was better to wait for posthumous fame and glory." And now it's hers.



Waiting for Dobot

ers to the Editor

Vic

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## Waiting for Dobot

But lists are not all

THE FIGURES look awful — and the Health Secretary agrees. He says they are dreadful, and he says he is very sorry. "New waiting list figures," his department press statement put it baldly yesterday, "released today are bad". Frank Dobson makes a point of taking responsibility for the government's failure to reduce the lists over the winter. The numbers waiting for NHS beds have gone up significantly — an increase of 54,000 in October-December 1997 or 4.5 per cent. In explanation Mr Dobson merely argues that it does not amount to the "winter crisis" which they had pledged to avoid.

Honesty is always refreshing, but it may not get us much closer to tackling what is a very complex subject, made more so by being so highly politicised. The immediate question is whether the figures could have been somehow reduced. In October Mr Dobson announced a £300 million boost for the NHS, specifically targeted at tackling emergency admissions and waiting lists in the winter months and beyond. In November he set up a Waiting List Action Team, backed by eight regional task forces. These were going to "train their sights on where local problems have arisen". It all sounded great combative stuff at the time, yet it has had no perceptible effect. Mr Dobson says that under the government the NHS has "coped better than ever before with the winter pressures" — but it has been a very mild winter. The NHS was unable even to fulfil the more modest pledge that no one

should have to wait more than 18 months for treatment again the numbers have gone up, from 800 to 974 patients. He also says that more patients are being treated than ever before — yet when has that not been the case? There is also a pledge that by the end of March no one at all will be forced to wait more than 18 months. But that still has to be delivered — and who knows what other services may be squeezed to ensure the pledge is met?

Yet there are substantial arguments in Mr Dobson's favour, as well as a broader question as to whether we should really regard waiting lists as the touchstone for NHS performance. The Health Secretary's famous comparison of the lists to a super-tanker which takes time to slow down is fair enough. The lists were rising fast: it was unrealistic to suppose that extra money and a new task force would turn them around in a few months. Their pilot projects cover some interesting areas, such as moving treatment closer to home, and matching referral decisions more closely to clinical priorities. But reforms of any kind will not work well if they are rushed through. A decision was also taken to stop all elective surgery to clear the decks for the expected flood of winter casualties. But with less snow and ice, there have been fewer broken limbs and concussions. The decision was the right one in theory. In spite of global warming we cannot rule out the possibility of winter being winter. But it also helped lengthen the lists.

The government may consider that waiting lists are not the only criterion by which to judge the NHS. If they have become so, then it has only itself to blame. The pledge to cut waiting lists by 100,000 had its use as an electoral carrot last year. Labour cannot really complain if the opposition now turns non-performance into a stick against it. In

the longer-term, the health debate has to get off this roller-coasting argument. The only pledge which makes sense is to improve the health service across the board, without being fixated by one particular set of statistics.

This does not mean that efforts should not be made to reduce the lists. Though some categories on them may be of marginal importance, the social and human cost of waiting for "non-urgent" treatment is still very considerable. If it needs more money to tackle the problem properly, then there are ways of finding it. Mr Dobson should not have to put himself, as he did yesterday, in the position of arguing that repayment of the national debt must take higher priority. That is the Chancellor's job, not his. Most people still believe that the health service, across the board, remains the highest public priority of all.

## A Tory ache

Don't mention John Redwood

IF WILLIAM Hague were to start banging his distinctively-shaped head against the nearest brick wall, you could hardly blame him. No sooner had he unveiled his plans for sweeping reform of the Conservative Party, than a member of his own Shadow Cabinet decided to turn the clock back — serving up a little reminder of the divisions and xenophobia that caused such agony for the Tories before they banished themselves into opposition last May. Not for the first time, the trouble came from John Redwood.

The Shadow President of the Board of Trade sent out one of his attack faxes, condemning the hurgers of London for honouring Helmut Kohl as a freeman of the City. Mr Redwood said the gesture was a

"mistake," part of a Government plot to promote the single currency fattered by Chancellor Kohl — or, in the former minister's words, to "prepare for the abolition of the pound by stealth." In his press release the Wokingham MP promised a series of Commons questions, claiming he sought to get to the bottom of Labour's role in the City's decision.

The move could not have been more embarrassing. Far from denouncing the tribute to Mr Kohl, official Conservative policy had been to praise it; indeed, the party's foreign affairs spokesman attended Wednesday's ceremony as the representative of Mr Hague. By his rogue initiative, John Redwood not only broke the party line — he also aligned himself with the catallin placard-wielding europhobes who harassed guests as they arrived at the Guildhall. The protesters' use of a Second World War air raid siren spoke volumes, marking them out as little more than unreconstructed anti-Germans, so stuck in the past they were unable to see the present — let alone the future.

William Hague ordered his errant colleague to "withdraw" the offending press release — whatever that means — in a move his aides conceded was a deliberate "slapdown." But the leader must surely know the strife is not over. Mr Redwood's action proves that the European dilemma has not lost its corrosive power over the Conservative party: spasms of scepticism will continue to split the Tory front bench. More deeply, Mr Hague should have learned this week that alterations to Conservative machinery alone cannot hope to cure the party's maladies. The Tory problem is not organisational, but political — even cultural. If the party still appears ideologically riven, it will not regain the nation's attention. And if it remains rooted

in the unpleasant petty English nationalism on display at the Guildhall, then it will surely not deserve to.

## Changing Jews

An old nerve is touched

LIKE FATHER, like son. Nick Howard has clearly inherited his father's knack for stirring controversy: the son of the former Home Secretary has sparked a row at Oxford University by spearheading a campaign to convert Jews to Christianity. He himself made the switch at Eton and wants to spread the good news. The energetic Oxford rabbi, Shmuley Boteach, has condemned this effort as "spiritual Nazism."

Those who have heard the two sides debate each other may well have wondered if the rabbi was slightly over-reacting. After all, campus Christians have always "targeted" non-believers of all backgrounds — urging them to discuss scripture over a cup of coffee. Surely there's no mortal threat posed by a simple invitation to a meeting — even if kosher food is served. If Jews are confident in their faith, then they will not easily be swayed.

But such a view misreads the unique echoes Jews hear when people try to prise them from their tradition. Rabbi Boteach is right that attempts to convert the Jews have always preceded their physical persecution — with the Spanish Inquisition only the best known example. What a missionary may intend as a friendly knock on the door sounds altogether different to a people which has endured this past. Young Mr Howard should remember that "the conversion of the Jews" was once used as a synonym for the end of the world — as if the day would never come.

## Letters to the Editor

### A date on the terraces

JOHN Duncan's article on the football economy made some valid points about the arrogance with which many football clubs treat their supporters (Analysis, February 18). Anyone expecting a rapid change of heart should not, however, hold their breath. In 1996, market research company Abram Hawkes sent three separate requests for information on season tickets, club membership and merchandise to each of the 132 football clubs in the seven professional leagues in England and Scotland.

They produced a detailed report on the inadequacies of the way clubs marketed themselves and then wrote to the 132 clubs, outlining their findings and offering the report for sale at £45.00. They sold 37. Perhaps the clubs couldn't afford it. David Murphy, Ashted, Surrey.

NOT for the first time, your book pages yesterday were largely a women-free zone. Books about men, written by men, reviewed by men. Or interviews of male authors by male columnists. Exceptions — Princess Diana, a patched up Dorothy L. Sayers and Lucinda Steward spread thin. Elisabeth Lindner, London.

SURELY the simplest rule for referring to dates in the new century would be to call the years 2000-2009 "two thousand and ..." and thereafter "twenty-ten" etc (Letters, February 18). It is surely customary to say that the Vikings were reputed to have reached North America in the year "One thousand", but to speak of "Ten sixty-six". Patrick Mills, Cambridge.

## Victims of the coming war

KOPI Annan has gone to Baghdad (Annan mission to Iraq delays US-led strike, February 19) but the US ambassador to the UN says "We reserve the right to oppose a potential deal that would harm our national interests" and threatens Iraq with "serious consequences." I'm delighted the US has stopped pretending that if they bomb Iraq they will be acting in support of the UN, and as a result to avoid standing by Annan's deal and disassociate themselves from an aggressive war of US national interest. Caryl Churchill, London.

I WAS much moved by Maggie O'Kane's eloquent report on the appalling suffering of the people of Iraq. At last the real "crisis in the Gulf" has made the front page (February 19). I have made a study of 100 minutes of video footage of recent television coverage and I could find only one three-second glimpse of a starving Iraqi child. This represents just 0.05 per cent of a whole week's "news" on the five terrestrial channels. The remaining 99.95 per cent was sexy shots of tornadoes, BSE, tomahawk cruise missiles, gang-bang American pilots and generals and endless prattle about Saddam's "weapons of mass destruction". Paul O'Hanlon, London W8.

THERE have been many times in the past when I have been reminded of my gratitude at being a Guardian reader: yesterday was one of them. Maggie O'Kane's report described graphically the ghastly effect of war on the innocent people of Iraq. I feel that I have to add my voice to those of so many thousands of people the world over who object to the prospect of war in

Iraq. Why are the US and the UK so keen to unleash terror on so many of Saddam's fellow countrymen, women and children by bombing Iraq? Surely, the primary dispute is between Saddam and the United Nations. It should follow, therefore, that the United Nations should decide what, if any, action to take if it refuses to comply with their inspection rules. What moral right have the US and the UK to act independently? Also, how can we justify this moralising attitude when we have been supplying Iraq with weapons for years? Linda Warden, London.

WHAT is the role of sanctions now? Despite causing widespread suffering and death, they have evidently failed to help maintain peace. Jane Green, Coventry.

I WISH Maggie O'Kane's report could have been read in full to the House of Commons on Tuesday. The Iraq debate of that day was a depressing spectacle, the division list "ayes" a Labour roll of dishonour: Meacher, Ruddock, Hain... the list is long. Tom McFadyen, Glasgow.

THERE are four methods people traditionally use when dealing with a bully: acquiescence, manipulation, escalation and communication. What we are witnessing on the world stage at the moment is escalation: trying to force a bully to back down by the use of superior power. It won't solve the underlying problem; it never does.

In this case it may result in the spread of deadly toxins over huge areas and agonising death for millions of innocents. Moreover, the leaders

of the other nations in the region, those most threatened by the chemical or biological weapons in question, do not want military force to be used; they have come all the way to 10 Downing Street to say so. The only method that will solve this problem at its root is communication: convene a meeting involving all the nations of the Middle East, including all those who have stocks of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and the US. The aim of the meeting should be to address fear: Iraq's fear of Iran, Iran's fear of Iraq, Israel's fear of her Arab neighbours, America's fear of Islamic fundamentalism, the Kurds' fear of annihilation, and all the other massive fears which pervade the region.

Until these fears are addressed, there will be no peace. Not only will there be no peace, but there will be no winner except the arms trade, which thrives on the preservation of "rogue dictators" like Saddam Hussein. Dr Seila Elworthy, Oxford Research Group, Oxford.

## Judge not

RTHON Lord Justice Stuart-Smith (Edinburgh) "betrayal", say relatives. February 19) educated Radley, Corpus Christi and Lieutenant, 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards. Called to the Bar 1982. Recreations: playing cello, shooting, playing bridge, Club: Beeston. Appears more Establishment than Trenchard: does he know who Robbie Fowler is? Brenda Grant, London.

Please supply a full address. We may edit letters.



## Mr MacCabe and his scroungers

COLIN MacCabe's outrage at his son and daughter claiming benefits which he believes they did not need was misplaced (Why I lost my faith in the welfare state, February 18). It seems clear that he was neither prepared to let his daughter have a living allowance, nor assist his son with the rent of his flat, therefore whatever the level of his income might be, it was irrelevant to them.

Although the state still assumes that a man who has sex with a woman may be expected to support her financially, whether or not he actually does so, the state does not assume that parents must support their children financially once they are over 18 which is fortunate, since most don't and wouldn't if they had to. The exception of course is full-time students: the state assumes that parents will pay.

benefits than they did in 1979. Mr MacCabe is also correct to draw attention to the absurd level of costs involved in attempting to distinguish between justified and unjustified claims for benefits — almost 3.5 per cent of total benefit expenditure is wasted on administration. R Stevens-Strohmann, Director, Citizens' Income Trust, London.

IF Mr MacCabe's daughter received "supplementary benefit" four years ago she was indeed receiving a benefit to which she was not entitled: supplementary benefit was abolished in 1988 and replaced by income support. MacCabe then attacks "middle-class students claiming supplementary benefit" but students are barred from claiming income support.

The "random research" which MacCabe did for his article seems to have left him with the most elementary ignorance on the subject. And for those who can claim income support, their claim is decided on the basis of their income. Not their class. Dr Julian Goodare, Edinburgh.

HAS Mr MacCabe shopped his children to the government's "Tell on a cheat" hotline? If not, why not? Peter Taylor-Gooch, University of Kent.

## Reasons behind my son's death

ACCORDING to the coroner's report, the operation performed on my son to correct a series of heart defects known as a Fallot's Tetralogy on January 24, 1991, was a success (Faith under the knife, February 18).

The operation was carried out at the Bristol Royal Infirmary by Mr James Wisheart and his team. Ben was one of the first patients to be called in following a postponement for the possibility of massive numbers of casualties being evacuated from the Gulf war... the timing of world events and the hearings of the GMC have a certain *deja vu* about them.

I have memories of Stephen Boina giving three-and-a-half-year-old Ben an injection in the back of his hand as I held him tightly on my knee. He fought off the pre-med, hence the necessity for my wife and I to take him down to the operating reception room. The anaesthetic pole-axed him and I

nearly dropped his floppy body. Although the body was kept alive for five days, we never saw our son "alive" again.

At the time, my wife and I were satisfied with the coroner's report, and Mr Wisheart's explanations as to what had happened: simply that Ben's body had not been able to withstand the insult (his own words) that it had been subjected to.

According to the charges facing the two consultant surgeons and the hospital administrator, Stephen Boina first began to bring his concerns to the attention of his superiors by way of a letter written in 1990.

Over the last few months, all the wounds are being reopened, particularly the guilt that one always experiences under such circumstances. Ben's case is not one of those being considered in this hearing of the GMC. I feel that I must add my name to those requesting a full public inquiry. Euan Wingfield, Taunton, Somerset.

## Best of trends

### Bel Littlejohn

IF you read Tuesday's moving, moving piece in G2 about middle-class kids going on the game? Did you? Well did you? ANSWER ME! Sorry to raise my voice like that. It's not like me, really. It's not I just didn't realise how upset that piece would make me. It quite literally filled me with horror to think of those poor kids — students, a lot of them, from middle-class backgrounds, all study-

ing hard, now reduced to stripping off, parading down the mean streets and selling their bodies to punters in a logical extension of the Thatcherite monetarist environment into which they were socialised.

"Why have middle-class students decided that prostitution is a neat way to make money?" was the heading. "Everyone's doing it," they apparently said. "Why do they do it? They need the money, that's why... to money, that's why... to money, that's why... to money, that's why..." Powerful stuff. And the evidence? It's threefold, and shattering. First, there's a report that male undergraduates at Cambridge "are being invited" to join an escort agency, even if so far no-one's actually done it.

Second, two weeks ago, the daughter of a Conservative MP was found picking up men at Stringfellow's. And finally, two years ago, Jean-

ette Winterson told an interviewer that, as a student, she had had sex with women in return for kitchenware.

So that's at the very least two people in Britain, one of them less than 20 years ago. If that doesn't make the problem terrifyingly widespread, then my God, I don't know what does. It's articles like this that tell me loud and clear that it's time we all sat up and listened to what the hell's going on in this so-called society of ours. If only someone had written something like it 20 years ago, then the lovely Jeanette Winterson might have been saved from her fate, and the statistics for the current wave of student prostitution would have been slashed in half.

Of course, you don't have to teach me any lessons about concerned journalism. As an award-winning commentator, I've been identifying deeply worrying trends in our society for over a quarter of a century now, sometimes at the

rate of two a month. Only last week in The Observer, I alerted the nation to one of the deepest and most worrying trends of the past fortnight. "Why have high flying female executives decided they would rather spend their days watching daytime TV?" I asked, going on to identify a potentially catastrophic new trend in our society, the emergence of a new daytime-TV-watching post-executive female underclass.

THE evidence was stark. Provocative. And brutally compelling. The Sunday Express had run a story just 27 months ago about a 32-year-old woman who had given up her job as a merchant banker and was now just looking after her three kids — and watching daytime TV for up to two hours a day.

Not only that, but in The Sunday Times, a profile of top-ranking executive Marcia Bluns of Airbus UK Ltd

revealed that on her week-ends off, she likes nothing more than "to snatch an hour or two watching telly".

"Everyone's doing it, apparently," I wrote in a hard-hitting piece to shame us all. "Why do they? Because the strain on a woman of a high pressure job is proving too much, and the deadly, dumbed-down drug of daytime TV is too tantalising a temptation to ignore. With upwards of two important female achievers already descending inexorably into TV torpor, it looks as if the post-feminist avalanche of women allowing their brains to turn to TV jelly is now well and truly under way. And frankly it terrifies the life out of me."

With my cool-headed forensic skills, I traced the current epidemic to the door of Thatcher's Children. And it's Thatcher's Children who are singled out for blame in this Sunday's piece, in which I identify another alarming new trend in our society: the

growing number of professional men and women who are developing a potentially dangerous quasi-religious obsession with butterflies. For too long, we as a society have turned a blind eye to the signals — the theme music Life Is Like A Butterfly from the popular Wendy Craig sitcom of the same name, Damien Hirst's highly publicised butterfly collage, the butterflies that are clearly visible in the background of the Teletubbies television series, butterfly-shaped earrings on sale in High Street chain-stores, the unprecedented success of the seventies rock band Iron Butterfly and — most concerning of all — the wholly unreported tendency of ordinary men and women to stalk lone butterflies at dead of night with hammers and chisels. It's a trend. And it's deeply worrying. So what does it all add up to? Could it be a deeply worrying trend? That's my overwhelming fear for this week.

What do you want me to do? Stop shooting now and release it as the five commandments?

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## Stories of a small land

**Svanhildur Oskarsdóttir**

# Standing in for India



**Nanda... reclusive**

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**Hareesh Pandya**

## Dame Shirley's enemy within



**Prendergast... mandarin**

**Ulyd Harrington**

## Shell shock

## Risk business

FOR some people, searching for a way to put themselves in such death-defying situations is the meaning of life. Ask them if they are insane, or if they have a death-wish, and they won't hear of it. In a warped kind of way, dicing with death is a compulsive game that, simply put, makes them once more alive. Word is that once you've got the taste for it, this kind of addiction is hard to give up.

John Syer, sports psychologist at the University of Bath, says: "You're the sort of person who enjoys taking risks, when you stop to think about it."

But why so many people are prepared to go over the edge to get more out of life.

**Jackie and Iwan's Guide:** E-mail [jackieandiwans@guardian.co.uk](mailto:jackieandiwans@guardian.co.uk); fax [+441717134366](tel:+441717134366); write [jackieandiwans@guardian.co.uk](mailto:jackieandiwans@guardian.co.uk). The Guardian, 119 Parrington Road, London EC1R 3ER.

## Hannah Pool

## Death Notices

**MAYLIE, Grace.** Widow of the Reverend Dr. F. Bayly Esq., on 14th February, 1891, at 10, St. James's Place, London, W. Aged 74 years. Buried on Monday 20th February at 10.5, at New Burial Ground, Kensal Green, London, W. Friends and acquaintances may be seen at the funeral on Wednesday 27th February at 11, at the residence of Mr. C. J. Parnock & Sons, 10, St. James's Place, London, W.

**PROCTOR, Toms,** died suddenly in London on Monday 19th February, 1891, at 10, St. James's Place, London, W. Aged 74 years. Buried on Monday 20th February at 10.5, at New Burial Ground, Kensal Green, London, W. Friends and acquaintances may be seen at the funeral on Wednesday 27th February at 11, at the residence of Mr. C. J. Parnock & Sons, 10, St. James's Place, London, W.

**DOMMOND, On 11th and 18th February** 1891, at 10, St. James's Place, London, W. Aged 74 years. Buried on Monday 20th February at 10.5, at New Burial Ground, Kensal Green, London, W. Friends and acquaintances may be seen at the funeral on Wednesday 27th February at 11, at the residence of Mr. C. J. Parnock & Sons, 10, St. James's Place, London, W.

**PEAR, Professor Richard Hatherton,** on 14th February 1891, aged 81, peacefully at his residence, 10, St. James's Place, London, W. Aged 81 years. Buried on Monday 20th February at 10.5, at New Burial Ground, Kensal Green, London, W. Friends and acquaintances may be seen at the funeral on Wednesday 27th February at 11, at the residence of Mr. C. J. Parnock & Sons, 10, St. James's Place, London, W.

**THOMSON, Arthur,** husband of Ruth and son of John and Mary Thomson, died on 14th February 1891, at 10, St. James's Place, London, W. Aged 74 years. Buried on Monday 20th February at 10.5, at New Burial Ground, Kensal Green, London, W. Friends and acquaintances may be seen at the funeral on Wednesday 27th February at 11, at the residence of Mr. C. J. Parnock & Sons, 10, St. James's Place, London, W.

**WILLIAMS, John,** died on 14th February 1891, at 10, St. James's Place, London, W. Aged 74 years. Buried on Monday 20th February at 10.5, at New Burial Ground, Kensal Green, London, W. Friends and acquaintances may be seen at the funeral on Wednesday 27th February at 11, at the residence of Mr. C. J. Parnock & Sons, 10, St. James's Place, London, W.

7a and 3pm Mon-Fri.



# Brown to stamp on the NI 'jobs tax'

Larry Elliott and Mark Atkinson

GORDON BROWN is set to scrap National Insurance Contributions for firms taking on low-paid workers in next month's Budget after a call for a radical shake-up of the system by the head of the Government's tax and benefits review.

Under the plan drawn up by Martin Taylor, the Barclays chief executive, employers' NICs would be abolished on all weekly earnings less than £80 and a flat-rate of 12.2 per cent applied to all pay above that level.

The move would make it more attractive to hire people at the bottom of the income scale but more expensive to employ workers on top salary levels.

Although the Treasury was not commenting yesterday on Mr Taylor's recommendation, the Chancellor is known to favour any reform of NICs that would help the low-paid find work.

The Barclays chief executive last night asked employers' organisations to comment on the proposed changes, but said: "I believe the present structure imposes a heavy burden at the lower end of earnings distribution."

In my view, there is scope to reform NICs to encourage job creation at the lower end, remove distortions and reduce administrative burdens on employers."

The CBI gave a cautious welcome to the proposals, saying it could have a positive impact in lower wage sectors.

Adam Turner, the organisation's director-general, said: "The CBI supports the aim of improving incentives to create employment, and therefore sees potential merit in the proposed changes to employers' National Insurance Contributions."

"Such a reform could have

a positive impact on employment in lower-wage sectors, and could help to offset the inflationary pressures likely to be created by the introduction of the minimum wage."

"We will, however, have to consider in more detail the impact of the change on companies with a high average salary bill, some of whom already face increased employment costs due to the phasing out of profit-related pay."

Under the current structure, NICs will begin to be paid at £64 a week from April. Once that threshold is crossed, employers go from paying no NICs to 3 per cent on all earnings. "This is equal to £1.92 a week — a powerful incentive not to create jobs at or above this earnings level," said Mr Taylor. "Similarly, there are steps at earnings levels of £110, £155 and £210, where an additional penny of earnings triggers large payments. Not surprisingly, employers are also reluctant to create jobs above those earnings thresholds."

Mr Taylor went on: "To eliminate these penalties on creating jobs where they are greatly needed, I am considering proposing a reform that would reduce employers' NIC on low-paid jobs."

"To be more precise, I should like the Chancellor to consider raising the point at which employers begin to pay NICs, to charge no NICs on any earnings below this level and to do away with sudden lumps of NICs associated with the 'steps'."

Mr Taylor said his proposals would not bring in extra cash to the Government but acknowledged that the main consequence would be to increase employer NICs slightly in respect of employees earning over £440 a week.

Budget changes to the NIC regime on March 17, signalled in November's Pre-Budget Report, are expected to be complemented by a tax credit to boost work incentives for employees.

## Play gets serious



Half-term holidays will never be the same again. A baby version of PlayStation is planned by Sony

# Sony tries hand-to-hand combat

PlayStation outsold all its rivals. Now it's going mobile. Stuart Miller reports

IT IS almost exactly a year since Nintendo, with a hype campaign of almost mythical proportions, finally released the machine it claimed represented the future of computer games consoles. Cartridge-based games, 64-bit graphics, a controller that would not look out of place in the cockpit of a Stealth bomber; the Nintendo 64 had the lot.

Now, after 12 months of "console wars", there comes the strongest sign yet of the extent to which the N64 has failed even to dent the dominance of its rival, the Sony PlayStation. Not content with its massive share of the \$15 billion global games market on the world's television sets, Sony plans to release a handheld, baby version of its gaming phenomenon.

From this time next year, minor details such as work, school or family commitments need never interrupt a gamer just as they reach that elusive level on Tekken or prepare to fight the final round of the World Championship in Formula 1.

The sales figures for the PlayStation are remarkable. In Britain alone, it has more than 70 per cent of the market. The company claims it will have sold its two millionth console within the next couple of months. On Christmas Day, some 650,000 members of the human race opened their wrapping to find a PlayStation.

Against this performance, the N64 and the other also-rans, the Sega Saturn, cannot compete. Even Nintendo's price slashing — the N64 was launched at £250, falling to less than £100 by Christmas — has failed to impress discerning gamers.

## Bid talk boosts ailing Filofax

FILOFAX, responsible for the archetypal rumpy accessory of the 1980s, yesterday indicated that it could be in takeover talks, writes Pauline Spragg. It said it was talking to a number of parties about selling the whole or part of the group, strategic alliances and joint ventures.

## Doorstep lender pays out windfall

Jonathan Conliffe

PROVIDENT Financial, which charges an annual interest rate of 164 per cent on loans to the poor, yesterday announced a £93 million windfall for its shareholders.

Britain's largest lender of credit collected weekly on the doorstep said it was handing the cash to investors because it was not needed to expand the business.

Mary Sullivan, of the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, said the payout highlighted the ethical dilemma over whether to invest in such a company.

Provident, whose share price has risen by two-thirds over the past year, reported annual profits had risen by 15 per cent to £126.5 million.

The company relies on the 20 per cent of the population rejected by traditional lenders as too risky.

While "The Provvy" has to make relatively high bad debt

provisions, it more than makes up for this with interest rates vastly higher than the average 16 per cent charged by banks. The lending division made £127 million profit on £733 million of loans.

Ms Sullivan said that, while Provident provided a service to those on low incomes, credit unions and friendly societies offered much better deals. "Provident sells on the basis that people can afford 55 or so a week, without giving emphasis to what the total repayment cost will be."

But she said that the company works within the boundaries of the Consumer Credit Act and it was up to the Government to decide whether to follow the example of several European countries which cap annual percentage rates.

Howard Bell, Provident's chief executive, said: "We actually cost less than many high street banks when you take into account the totality of their charges such as arrangement fees."

## Trocadero chief pins hopes on Enid Blyton and bars

Tony May

TROCADERO leisure group — still smarting from problems with its Segaworld joint venture — is putting its faith in expansion away from its origins in London's Piccadilly Circus.

John Conlan, who took over as chief executive and chairman in July, said the group's future lay with the exploitation of its Enid Blyton copyrights, which generated an operating profit of £2.01 million last year, and with a chain of new bars.

The group paid £10.5 million for five London bars last week and Mr Conlan plans to expand the Zoo Bar, Venom, Oxygen and Bar Madrid formats to other sites.

He said the bars were



Lure of the Segaworld arcade games failed to hit the right buttons with customers last year

PHOTOGRAPH: GARY DALTON

## TUC challenges UK jobs record

Seumas Milne Labour Editor

UNEMPLOYMENT in Britain is higher than in France and Germany if those who are excluded from the active labour market but want to work are added to the official jobless total, according to a TUC report published today, on the eve of the G8 employment summit in London.

The large and rising proportion of those in the UK classified as "inactive" but who want a job — at 13 per cent, the highest rate in the European Union and more than double the average — undermines claims that a flexible British labour market is delivering the goods on employment, the TUC says.

Describing Britain as the "jobs exclusion capital of Europe", the report argues that, once the sharp increase in the number of those shut out of the labour market since 1992 — often because they were forced off the official

dole count on to disability and long-term sickness benefits — is taken into account, the country's job creation record has been "mediocre".

Using the most recent figures from the EU's labour force survey, the overall proportion of those who wanted work was found to be just under 15 per cent in Britain, compared with 13.4 per cent in France and 13.1 per cent in Germany. Britain's rate will have since improved, while Germany's will have got worse, taking all three countries to a rate of between 13 and 14 per cent.

The recent fall in British unemployment is due to a combination of growth faster than the EU average and the fact that far more people who want to work were pushed out of the labour market in the UK than in any other member state, the report concludes.

Another "key weakness" of Britain's labour market, the TUC argues, is the high proportion of men over 25 who have been unemployed for more than two years.

## Hampshire's house buyers move with the times

Report Jones

THE recovery in house prices may be faltering, but properties are selling more quickly than ever. The average time taken to sell a house has dropped to just 11 weeks — half what it was in 1995, a new study shows.

Almost 50 per cent of the properties put on the market are sold in six weeks or less, and one in ten goes within seven days, said estate agency network Black Horse, part of Lloyds TSB.

There are big regional variations. While 40 per cent of properties in the South-east are sold in three weeks or

less, the average seller in the North-west has to wait for more than four months.

The 11-week national average is the fastest sale time since the agency started its regular reports on the housing market in August 1995. That summer, the figure was 22 weeks.

The dramatic drop since then is attributed to a range of factors. For one thing, shortages of quality property in many areas means that buyers act quickly.

"The mortgage market has become much more sophisticated," said Ian Davies at Black Horse. "It's certainly much more competitive. As a result you can generally get

the money a lot more rapidly if you fit the criteria."

The new report reveals that the fastest-selling area is Alton in Hampshire, where the average time between a home being put on the market and a sale being agreed is just two weeks. Close behind at three weeks are Gorleston, in Norfolk, Clarkson in Glasgow, Jesmond in Newcastle upon Tyne, Chelmsford in Essex, and Worcester Park, Surrey.

So what is it about Alton that makes it such a hot spot? "It's a very nice place to live," says Mr Davies. "People in Alton are commuting to London, they are commuting to the south coast, to places like Portsmouth and Southampton, and there is a lot of countryside you can get to easily."

While the average selling time in the South-east is seven weeks, and eight weeks in the Eastern region, sales in the North-west take 17 weeks, and 13 weeks in the Midlands and North-east of England.

The typical property achieves 95 per cent of the asking price. The survey found that gazumping — where a seller accepts an offer but then pulls out after receiving a higher one — affects 3 per cent of transactions, down from 5 per cent last year.

"The market is steady, and while there is still a lack of choice for those wishing to

buy, there are recent indications of more sellers being prepared to put their homes on the market before finding the property they wish to buy," said David Woodcock, the estate agency's managing director.

But further evidence that the housing market is continuing to cool came in the form of building society figures showing a sharp drop in mortgage lending.

Advances fell to £1.27 billion in January compared with £1.66 billion in December, said the Building Societies Association.

Mortgage approvals — where the building society has agreed to lend — totalled

£1.25 billion last month down from December's £1.46 billion.

"The lending figures for January provide continuing evidence of a slight slowdown in the housing market recovery," said Adrian Coles, the association's director-general.

He warned the Bank of England that another increase in interest rates was "likely to further dent confidence in the market".

He believed that the succession of interest rate rises and the cut in mortgage interest tax relief which takes effect in April have succeeded in moderating any inflationary pressure there may have been in the housing market.



## Tomorrow: The summit season opens

## Plus: Mixing tennis with business

Financial Editor: Alex Brummer  
Telephone: 0171-239-9610  
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## Mammon nods to spiritual needs of poorest

THE Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, and James Wolfensohn, World Bank president, at Lambeth Palace yesterday after co-chairing a "frank and intensive" dialogue about overcoming poverty.

Religious leaders from nine faiths and the bank agreed to work together to ensure development projects consider spiritual, moral and social factors as well as financial considerations, writes Mark Alderson.

In a joint statement, Dr Carey and Mr Wolfensohn said: "We cannot accept the suffering of so many millions of people around the world."

Religious communities will be invited to influence the bank's thinking over its annual world development reports.

The nine faiths represented were: Bahá'í, Buddhist, Christianity, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Taoist.

PHOTOGRAPH: ALASTAIR GRANT



## Grocer checks in at £1.2bn

Roger Cowe

SOMERFIELD and Kwik Save yesterday sealed a £1.2 billion merger to create the country's largest supermarket chain in terms of selling space. The combined group will have sales of £6 billion, putting it fifth largest supermarket by sales value.

Somerfield shareholders will own 62 per cent of the new group after the share swap, which will give Kwik Save shareholders seven Somerfield shares for every six of their present holdings. The share price of both companies leapt on the news.

The new combine will retain the Kwik Save name for about 600 smaller shops but Somerfield chief executive David Simons, who will lead the merged group, said up to 150 shops would close.

He warned that hundreds of jobs would go at Kwik Save's Prestatyn headquarters, which is to close. Putting the two companies together was expected to save at least £50 million. Reducing central overheads will contribute £15 million of that.

The 800 staff at Prestatyn will know within a month which jobs will be transferred

to Somerfield's headquarters in Bristol. The run-down of jobs in Prestatyn will take at least a year.

"We will be as fair as possible," Mr Simons said.

Somerfield's property director, Philip Coates, is a casualty of the merger. He is the only Somerfield director to lose out, with Terry Atkinson from the smaller company taking the top property job in the enlarged group.

The joint partner's marketing director, Phil Smith will become deputy chief executive, while finance director Derek Pretty will take charge of the stores which retain the Kwik Save brand.

Kwik Save chairman Simon Keswick will be the first chairman of the enlarged group but a new, independent chairman will be recruited. Somerfield chairman Andrew Thomas will be deputy chairman.

One hundred stores in the discount chain will be converted to the Somerfield format. Up to 150 others may be closed where they clash with Somerfield sites. Mr Simons said the fate of the remainder of the chain would be determined over the next 18 months through a series of test formats.

The company will continue with the New Generation format being tested by 19 Kwik Save stores.

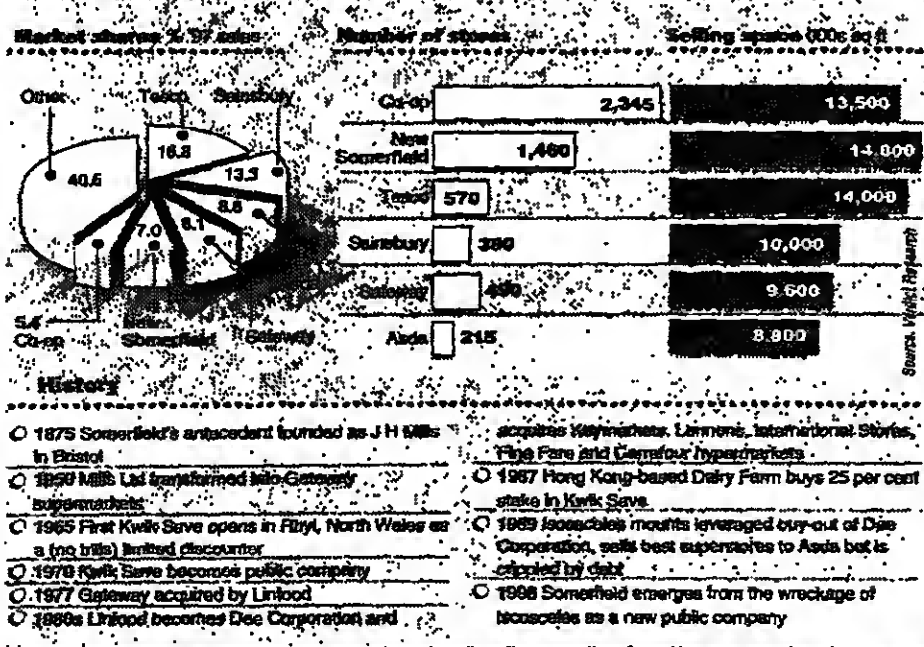
Analysts yesterday questioned whether the deal would help Somerfield compete with the supermarkets which increasingly dominate food retailing. But Mr Simons insisted that the new operation would be a powerful competitor.

Yesterday's statement included a profit warning from Kwik Save, despite improved sales performance.

Heavier spending on store wages and cleaning, higher advertising expenditure, and the cost of the New Generation strategy were blamed for

the depressed profit expectations. The company said that over the last eight weeks it had improved profit margins by 1 per cent and stemmed the fall in sales, which had previously been running at 5 per cent. Sales were still 1 per cent below last year's level.

## The new Somerfield



## BAe sees clout in cash terms

Nicholas Bannister, Chief Business Correspondent

BRITISH Aerospace increased profits last year by almost a third, only to see the improvement wiped out by the cost of withdrawing from its loss-making turbo-prop regional aircraft business.

The country's leading defence group disclosed that it was determined to increase its cash mountain to give it more clout in the expected restructuring of Europe's defence industry.

Chief executive Sir Richard Evans said the growing strength of the business "gives us a range of options" in the reshaping of the industry which the British, German and French governments called for last year.

Proposals from the various organisations involved, due to be submitted by March 31, would show where there was common ground and where the advantages and difficulties lay, he said.

Any move must add value for BAe shareholders as compensation for relinquishing any control, Sir Richard said. A three-way link involving

all three countries is widely regarded as the best way of creating a European defence group able to compete with America's big three defence groups - Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Hughes Aircraft.

But France's desire that its state-owned Aerospatiale should have a leading role in any combine is seen as a serious problem.

Sir Richard pointed out that it was essential that all shareholders in a new defence business should have the same rights. "It is a very difficult situation in France, where the government is relatively new and opposed to privatisation," he said.

The group is expecting Airbus Industrie, in which it has a 20 per cent stake, to increase production to meet demand. Profits from Airbus will be partially offset in the next two years by repayment of government launch aid.

BAe's profits before tax and exceptional items for 1997 rose 31 per cent to £598 million on sales 15 per cent ahead at a record £8.54 billion. However, the £230 million cost of ending production of the Jetstream turboprop aircraft left pre-tax profits £195 million lower at £330 million.

## Digital TV alarm is sounded

Chris Barrie, Media Business Correspondent

BROADCASTERS and television regulators are holding a crisis meeting today with the Radio Communications Agency amid concern that the launch of digital television may be hampered by the way the Government is negotiating for the right to use international frequencies.

The meeting comes after top television executives wrote to Margaret Beckett, the Trade and Industry Secretary, last week to complain of the slow progress being made by the RCA in its talks with Belgium and France over the rights to frequencies.

The executives include Sir Christopher Bland, chairman of the BBC, Michael Green, chairman of Carlton, Gerry Robinson, chairman of Granada, Leslie Hill, chairman of the ITV Network Centre, and Michael Jackson, chief executive of Channel 4.

The industry concern centres on the speed and manner of negotiation for the right to use frequencies needed for terrestrial digital television. The service is due to begin on November 1, and transmitters to cover 90 per cent of the country have to be installed at 81 sites before that date.

Broadcasters say they need to know details of the sites and frequencies very soon if they are to meet the deadline.

## George defends rates stance

Mark Atkinson, Economics Correspondent

BANK of England Governor Eddie George continued to make dovish noises on interest rates yesterday despite warning last week that a further increase in loan costs would be needed for the Government to hit its inflation target.

In evidence to the Commons Treasury select committee, Mr George told MPs that last week's quarterly Inflation Report, which projected a slight overshoot of the 2.5 per cent target, was not a "ready reckoner" that implied a rate rise would occur automatically.

It was a benchmark against which economic statistics were monitored, Mr George said. Asked if he viewed Wednesday's retail sales figures, showing the fastest growth rate for 10 years, as worrying, Mr George said seasonal distortions made the data hard to read. They did not demonstrate conclusively the case for higher rates.

Explaining his decision to vote against a rate rise at January's meeting of the Bank's monetary policy committee, where there was a 5-3 split in favour of leaving rates at 7.25 per cent, Mr George said

there were huge uncertainties about the strength of the economy and that the "costs of waiting were limited" when the forecast was so close to the target.

Moving hastily to tip the economy into an unnecessary recession when there was some evidence of domestic demand waning and exports were falling as a result of the strength of the pound.

Asia's financial crisis would aggravate the exports downturn.

William Butler, one of the three MPC members who voted in favour of higher rates in January, told MPs he thought raising interest rates was better done sooner rather than later.

"I tend to believe moving earlier is superior than moving later and having to move more to achieve the same effect," said Butler.

Charles Goodhart, who also voted for a rate increase in January, said that unlike the Governor he did not think any of the uncertainties about the economy would have been resolved by waiting.

He was concerned that soaring share prices might boost consumer spending and threaten the inflation target.

## Tesco forces town to polls

VOTERS in Tetbury - the local town for Prince Charles' Highgrove estate - were last night taking part in an unusual exercise in local democracy, writes Roger Cowe.

The 4,000 citizens on the electoral roll were casting their vote on the vexed issue of whether Tesco should be allowed to build a supermarket on the edge of the town, which boasts a small Somerfield store.

The unusual parish poll was called by the Labour group on Tetbury town council after opponents at the new store claimed that Tesco's own consultation exercise was flawed.

Labour councillor John Dearnley, who runs a toy and cycle shop in the Gloucestershire town, said he hoped voters would back Tesco's application. But, whatever the outcome, which is not hindering, he believes it is important to test local opinion.

All three representatives of the town on Cotswold district council are in favour of the application.

## Notebook

## Piloting Europe through clouds



Edited by Mark Milner

ALTHOUGH aerospace and defence are long-term businesses, there seemed a touch of hubris about British Aerospace yesterday as it contemplated income streams some 50 years in the future. Still, with the share price touching the stratosphere (£18.42 yesterday against little more than £1 in late 1992), BAe no doubt feels justified in a bullish view of the future.

The question is less, however, about whether the income streams will be there halfway through the next century but more how, and in what form, BAe will still be around. The need to compete with the increasingly powerful Americans is pressing the Europeans, including BAe, to rethink an industry often fragmented along national lines.

By aerospace and defence time-scales it is a pressing problem. BAe and its partners in Airbus have already committed themselves to turning their arrangement into a single corporate entity to which others, namely the Italians, would like to sign up. The restructuring of the pan-European defence business is being driven forward by the governments of France, Britain and Germany. They have given their leading companies until the end of next month to come up with proposals for the future.

The pressures are having their effect. As BAe was unveiling its latest figures yesterday, the board of France's Aerospatiale was in a huddle over plans for a new, forward-looking group structure, although its relationship with privately-owned Dassault still needs sorting out.

BAe looks in good shape. Its market capitalisation, order book and cash pile - despite the costs of exiting the turbo-prop business - will be handy assets in the complicated restructuring negotiations. Maintaining a clear view of shareholder value through the fog of conflicting interests will be a tricky task.

## Grocery bill

SOMERFIELD has achieved a triumph by mounting what is effectively a takeover of Kwik Save without paying a pre-

mium. That reflects the dire state of the Kwik Save business but also Somerfield's fragility in a market which is increasingly dominated by Tesco, Sainsbury and Asda.

Putting together these two strugglers is not likely to transform their prospects, however. It does give Somerfield the best chance it is likely to get to keep its earnings growth going for a year or two longer, thanks to the opportunities for savings and provisioning in putting together the two businesses.

The merger also gives Kwik Save's shareholders, Dairy Farm, a chance to slash its 29 per cent stake, converting it into a smaller share of a business with less grisly prospects.

But the end result is a new Somerfield with the same problems it has been struggling with throughout the 1990s, exacerbated by the addition of yet another format.

The fact remains that Tesco and Asda are making the running in food retailing. Unless there is a dramatic reversal in shopping habits, the new Somerfield will continue to struggle.

## Opposite banks

THIS week the governors of the central banks of the UK and Ireland, Eddie George and Maurice O'Connell, have been giving evidence to committees of members of their respective parliaments. What contrasting tales they had to tell.

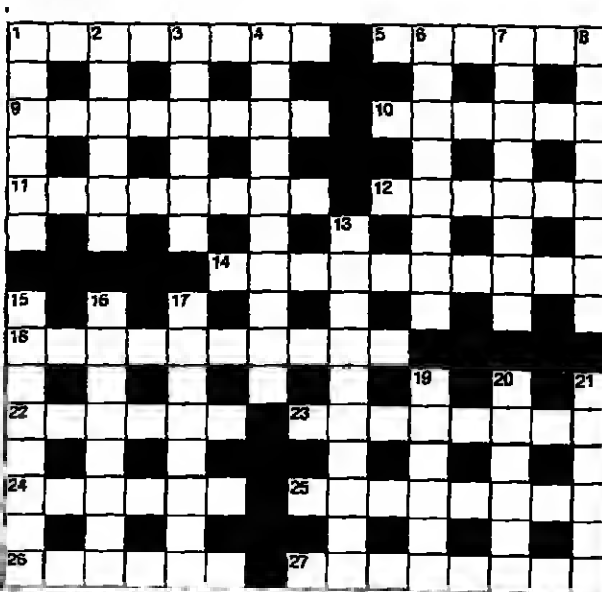
Yesterday, Mr George had the luxury of being able to argue that the Government's 2.5 per cent inflation target was not a "ready reckoner" by which to judge the Bank of England's action on interest rates.

Fifty poor Mr O'Connell. The Governor of the Bank of Ireland also has a pretty shrewd suspicion that Ireland may miss his, coincidentally, 2.5 per cent inflation forecast for 1998. In remarks to MPs made public yesterday he said that, all things being equal, Irish interest rates would be going up. All things are not equal, however. Ireland is heading for the first wave of monetary union and, despite the inflationary pressures, rates are likely to have to be cut to converge with levels prevailing among Ireland's European partners.

There may be a risk of the Irish economy overheating but there is not that much Mr O'Connell can do about it. The UK may face some of the same falling currency pressures as the Irish if the markets take the idea of the hard euro to heart and stop using sterling as a safe haven. But at least Mr George will be able to do something about it.

## Guardian Crossword No 21,203

Set by Crispa

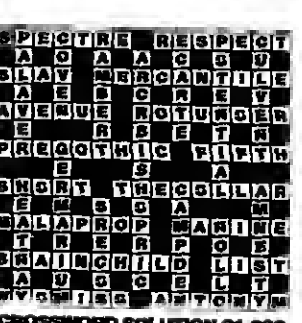


## Across

- 1 A better sign language (8)
- 5 Sup hot concoction and this may well be the result (6)
- 9 Fine royal personage showing consideration (8)
- 10 Working man likely to be in a union? (6)
- 11 No longer ministered to for long (8)
- 12 Argue about a boy's appearance (6)
- 14 Perpetually making changes till a team's formed (2,3,5)
- 16 Boards train - transport once regularly used (10)
- 22 Wear a false beard (5)
- 23 Leaves a group of fellows around bar (8)
- 24 Start striking hard (6)
- 25 Such jocularity can be distressing for the elderly (8)

## Down

- 1 In parliamentary debate there should be restraint (8)
- 2 Christian and Zionist leaders are about to suggest this is material (6)
- 3 Magnetic label split by family (6)
- 4 No coins get sorted out in overcrowded conditions (10)
- 6 Real estate of quality (6)
- 7 An employee takes part, and that's fine (8)
- 8 Aspartame starts possibly without point (8)
- 13 Wood for constructing bar - get on with it! (10)
- 15 Look into way out item on the menu (8)
- 16 The returning sailor



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 21,202

Smuggled gold, so he's reported (8)  
17 Steadier maybe, but most expeditious (8)  
19 Quite incomparable French article - fancy (6)  
20 The residence with silver in it occasions much admiration (6)  
21 Foot occupying place just for the money (6)

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Cyprus 0.85	Portugal 208.52	Turkey 357.880
Denmark 11.11	Saudi Arabia 8.05	USA 1.0058
Finland 6.86		

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